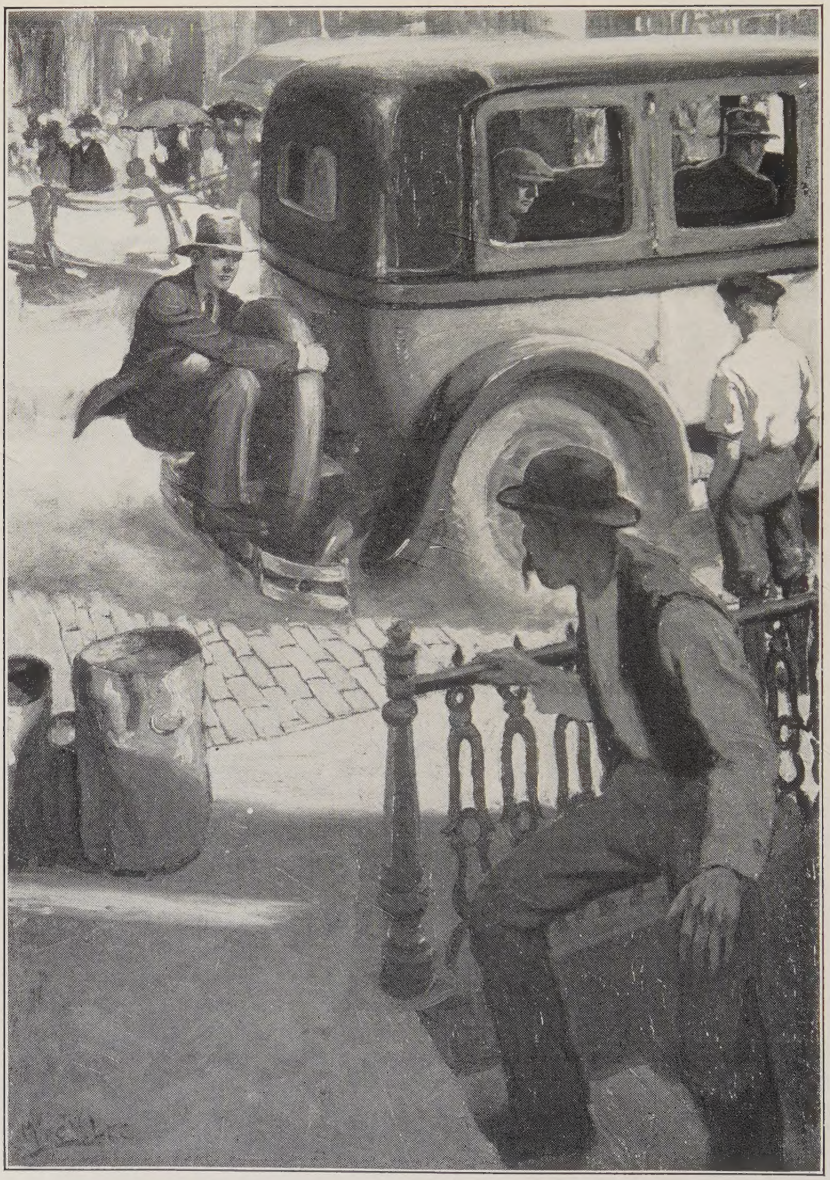
BUD BRIGHT
BOY DETECTIVE

A. VAN BUREN POWELL

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2026

https://archive.org/details/budbrightboydete0000avan



IN AN INSTANT BUD HAD SWUNG ONTO THE REAR TIRE

BUD BRIGHT, BOY DETECTIVE

BY

A. VAN BUREN POWELL

Author of

"BUD BRIGHT AND THE BANK ROBBERS"

THE PENN PUBLISHING COMPANY PHILADELPHIA

COPYRIGHT
1929 BY
THE PENN
PUBLISHING
COMPANY

Bud Bright, Boy Detective

Made in the U. S. A.

CONTENTS

I.	Good-bye, Bonds	7
II.	A New Use for Turnstiles	17
III.	Bud's Great Idea	22
IV.	Black Masks	29
V.	Clues and a Clash	39
VI.	Jerry	44
VII.	In Search of Evidence	52
VIII.	Initials	56
IX.	A Tight Place	64
X.	Headwork	68
XI.	In the Dark	76
XII.	Jerry Decides	81
XIII.	In the Shack	87
XIV.	Fast Work	90
XV.	Climax	99
XVI.	Bud's Way	104
XVII.	Jerry's Conscience	116
XVIII.	Vanished!	123
XIX.	The Hideout	128
XX.	Contact!	136
XXI.	No Answer	145
XXII.	Where Next?	149

XXIII. Clear Thinking 155
XXIV. The Barred Window . . . 163
XXV. The 'Phone Call 169
XXVI. A Hot Trail 175
XXVII. The Chase 182
XXVIII. Captive 189
XXIX. Before Dawn 199
XXX. Daylight 203
XXXI. And Then— 209

Bud Bright, Boy Detective

CHAPTER I

GOOD-BYE, BONDS

Bud seemed to hesitate in choosing between two neckties, either of which would make a fine present for Jerry's birthday. Actually he was covertly studying the clerk behind the counter.

To a casual customer everything probably would have seemed all right: Bud, who had traded at this haberdashery for three years and who was trained to notice little things by his contact with detective methods—he was a clerk in the office of the Gilroy Detective agency—thought something was decidedly wrong.

The clerk did not know where anything was; he did not know prices; he was getting fidgety because Bud delayed.

Tall for his age—just under sixteen—Bud-long Bright was a clean-cut, good-looking youth, representing the best type of young American manhood. His eyes were a cool gray, his other

features were well proportioned, with a chin denoting firmness and tenacity of purpose. He owned an athletic body, kept in trim by plenty of exercise, swimming, boxing, tennis, running. His brain was as alert as were his supple muscles.

"Make up your mind, will you?" said the restless clerk. "We close up at night, sometimes." Mr. Brown would never have engaged a clerk who spoke that way to old patrons. Something was queer here.

"This one is two dollars, you say?" Bud spoke. The other nodded shortly, drumming on the glass of the showcase. He turned and rang up the amount on the cash register, though Bud knew that a similar pattern in the window was priced a dollar higher.

The man almost snatched the tie and started to wrap it, not waiting for the money. Bud, wondering just what lay behind this odd salesman's anxiety, turned to glance into the street; that car by the curb had been there with engine running when he had turned into the store; it made him sure he had run into a hold-up!

That hold-up men were growing so bold that they actually waited on chance customers Bud knew. But Mr. Brown had told him, only last week, that he was securing a new clerk, which

had caused Bud to go slow before becoming suspicious enough to act.

"Here y'are," snapped the clerk, pushing the poorly tied parcel across the glass. So violent was his thrust that it fell to the floor. Bud stooped to recover it and at that instant the door to the room behind the store opened and two men came out.

They walked on past Bud, and then, between his position and the door, they paused. Bud was aware that they were staring at the big, buff colored envelope which, as he stooped, had partly slid out of his inside coat pocket.

That envelope contained Bonds—his mother's entire insurance award, paid at the death of his father years before, had been put into these profit-yielding securities. He had gotten them from the bank so that she could turn them in for a new issue.

Rising, his parcel in one hand, the other hastily poking the big envelope back to place, Bud noted the men. One was medium in height, ordinary in looks, and the other, not really a full grown man, but rather a youth not much older than Bud, was morose, sour looking, but at the moment exceedingly intent on that buff envelope.

Before Bud could straighten up and get his

balance the two were swiftly upon him. Each grabbed an arm and he was whirled around and rushed into the back room before he could either rebel or shout.

In the dark rear room expert fingers rapidly removed the envelope, his watch, knife and other valuables, not neglecting his money. Bud had realized that this was a modern store hold-up at the instant that the men first appeared, but the slipping out of his bond envelope had taken his mind from means of escape, and they had acted like lightning.

Bud felt himself rudely pushed so that he had to run in a staggering, blind way across the room; he stumbled over something soft, and went down in a heap even as he heard the door slammed and the lock snapped. A fine young detective—getting trapped this way!

No use going over the past, he reflected as he picked himself up in the dark. Rapidly he felt around on the body over which he had stumbled; strong cords bound it but his contact had evoked a grunt; Mr. Brown, it must be—not harmed, simply tied up.

Bud snatched the gag loose as gently as he could, and found his surmise correct, identified himself and interrupted the store owner's exclamations.

"Is that window up there barred?" He was thinking about his bonds, planning escape in time to see where the car went, get its number from its license plates if possible. The men must be in the store even yet, picking up what they wanted.

"No," mumbled Mr. Brown and began to demand that he be loosed; Bud, pushing and feeling around for the lightest movable object to help him get up to the high, small window, heard the front door slammed. "Too late," he said. "They're gone."

Nevertheless he dragged a chair over in the dark and climbed up till, standing on the tilting back of the swivel chair he could get hold of the catch and stare out at the sky, part of the buildings across the side street onto which the window looked.

The window wouldn't help; it was one of those turning affairs, swinging around on a pivot at the middle of the top and bottom, a ventilating transom.

But with his hands gripping the edge of its sill he slowly drew his body upward till his eyes could see the street, for it would seem logical for the escaping car to turn to the right into this side street—and there it was, coming past. Bud

strained his eyes to try to get the license number: it was hopeless. But the car stopped sharply; there was evidently some argument. Someone got out of the car, an arm from within caught and held the figure, then it wrenched free and hurried back toward the avenue on which the haberdashery fronted.

Bud dropped slowly till his feet found the bending back of the swivel chair, and from that he leaped down, hastily worked at the bonds on the prone Mr. Brown's wrists, found them too tight, rose and felt his way across the room, a sudden idea giving him hope.

Yes, he was right! There was a door into the hall running along the side of the store to apartments above it. Naturally he could unlock this; and he was out in that hall in the tick of a clock.

Once on the street he glanced hurriedly up and down. It was pretty late and few people were about—none near. He saw no one he might take for the youth whose form he had discerned as the electric corner light had lit it somewhat when the car had stopped.

Which way had he gone? Up or down? It was a toss-up. About five doors down the street a man came out on the sidewalk; he was a short, thick-set, foreign looking fellow: Bud pulled

back into the screening hall doorway, spying cautiously. Why did the fellow look this way and that, then return into the store? His action had something furtive about it.

Bud moved the instant that the other had gone back into his store: but by the time the young man reached the shop—a dimly lit, shoddy hat cleaning and shoe repairing shop it was, recently opened—the squat foreigner was not visible.

Someone else was, though, and Bud's heart gave a sudden skip. There was the youth of the hold-up, surely! He leaned against the flat counter and turned a scowling face as Bud threw the door wide and strode in to confront him.

"I'll trouble you for that envelope!" said Bud incisively.

The youth scowled more fiercely at him and the shop owner, with a frown on his swarthy, almost ugly face, bustled in from his back room with a parcel which he was tying up.

"What you talk?" he snarled. "Envelop' ?"

"He knows!" said Bud, jerking a thumb at the youth by the counter.

"I never seen you nor no envelope in my life," growled the youth. "Pick the right guy next time or you're liable to get your face smashed in."

"I want that envelope," insisted Bud.

"Diss man fren' for me," gabbled the shop owner. "He here long time, wait for shoe I fix. Diss hat-clean, shoe-fix. No envelop'."

No one was in the street: Bud looked out swiftly to see. He must leave the place to seek a policeman. They would have time to hide or destroy anything of his they might have. He was sure the youth had taken the bond envelope.

Without a word he turned and stalked out. They watched wordlessly and as he passed the window four baleful eyes glowered out at him. Bud walked rapidly until he had gotten out of range of those eyes, then swung quickly in at the door of the apartments under which the shop was located.

In the hallway he stood still, close to the door, able to spy that way, commanding the door from the rear room of the shop into this hall. The youth must come out eventually. He would either come into this hall and go upstairs, if he lived here, or go away down the street. Whether he had bonds or not, he was the one likely contact with the hold-ups. Bud would see where he went, then consult his chief, Gilroy, one of Brooklyn's cleverest private detectives, early the next morning.

Ear pressed to wall Bud tried to catch the

murmur of talk, but the adjoining wall was too thick. Presently the foreigner came to the sidewalk again, spied in both directions, walked down toward the hallway and even glanced in. But Bud was at the top of the stairway then. Peering cautiously over the railing and downward he saw the figure go out of sight toward the store, and came down quickly again.

Presently he saw the youth appear in the light before the shop, watchful, looking all around. Then he strode across the street and mingled with the crowd just coming out from the last show of the movie theatre across the street. Bud watched him go along, not daring to show himself on the sidewalk. But while the youth stopped to look into a store window Bud took advantage of the stopping of a truck at the curb between the youth and himself, and with that and a passing trolley car as shields, he got half-way across the street, took a chance and succeeded in mixing with the crowd unseen.

There followed a careful bit of shadowing; the youth had been attracted by some women, one of whom was carelessly swinging a handbag. He was following them, and did not think as much of pursuit as he otherwise might have done. Bud trailed, a trick he had learned from some work

at the agency, but when the women turned in at the subway and the youth followed, Bud felt that he was whipped. The subway station kept no agent on duty at night. Instead, machines were installed; they worked by inserting a nickel in a slot. If one had a nickel one could drop it into the slot and the mechanism would allow the bars of the machine to swing inward one quarter of a revolution, admitting the user. Without a nickel one must walk to the far end of the double station where, on a busier street, an agent would make change.

Bud saw the head of his quarry disappearing down the stairs as he ran up to the kiosk. No one else was in sight. He had no nickel and already the blur-r-r of a signal bell and the lighting of a green sign at the doorway indicated the approach of a train.

"Good-bye, bonds," said Bud.

CHAPTER II

A NEW USE FOR TURNSTILES

Bud shook the slot machine turnstile helplessly but it did not even budge.

He ran to the exit where heavy bars crossed each other all the way up to the ceiling inside a cage of equally heavy construction. He knew it would turn only in one direction—to let people out. He held a faint hope that it might be broken and that he might get it to swing in the wrong direction; but it didn't give an inch.

Added to his anxiety about his bonds was concern for the woman's handbag. That young fellow meant mischief.

He heard the squeal of brakes as the train ground to a stop.

A man came hurrying into the station, fumbling among some coins in his hand.

The nickel he found slipped as he tried to hustle it into the slot quickly, but it dropped in and the mechanism clicked.

Like lightning an idea leaped through Bud's mind: he must get to the train and see what was

going on; even at risk of straining the rules of right and wrong. He could come back and face the music later. Now he must act!

Like a shot he was across the space and pushing past the man, before the latter could pass into the turnstile. Bud thrust his body between the bars. Click!—whirr—click! He was inside and racing for the stairway to the train level.

Half-way down he stopped with mouth agape and no time to shout a warning. On the platform things were happening too swiftly.

As the woman with the handbag stepped onto the train the youth leaped close behind her and grabbed the bag. The other woman screamed and caught his arm. He wheeled and swung his hand so that it struck the woman's face. She gave a moan and went down in a huddle while the youth snatched up his dropped parcel and raced for the exit.

Bud whirled and fled up the stairs. He did not want to meet the running youth there: he had a better plan.

Up into the station hastened Bud and through the exit turnstile. The man whose nickel he had used saw him and started after him. Up came the youth with the bag and parcel, racing for the bars of the revolving exit cage.

As he reached the cage Bud eluded the grasp of the oncoming man and leaped forward. The bars were turning as Bud thrust his shoulder into the gap between the bars and the side of the cage. The bars crushed into his shoulder painfully but his ruse had succeeded. The bars could not revolve nor would they turn backward, and the youth was within the cage!

"Call a policeman," urged Bud but the man who had grasped his arm was too angry about the nickel to understand. It seemed to him that Bud was trying to squirm back into the enclosure and he meant to pull him out.

The youth begged the man to get Bud out, but that young man held desperately to the side of the cage, keeping the bars wedged.

Up from the train level panted the women and some of the train crew with passengers scuttling madly after them.

"That's the one!" cried a woman.

"Whistle for the police!" implored Bud.

The bars were crushing his shoulder and the angry man was dragging at his free arm. Between the pain and the strain Bud was beginning to see things through a haze.

Then five shrill blasts from the train whistle cut through the air while people began pushing

at the turnstile with the idea of getting hold of the captive youth.

Bud felt that he must let go of the cage: between the tug at his arm and the thrusting bars biting into his flesh, the pain was almost too much.

Just as he relaxed and, with the man hauling at him, was dragged free, a policeman hurried into the station.

"What's the matter?" he called.

The youth made his rush for freedom but the officer was agile and the race was short. He came back a sullen captive.

Explanations, of course; and Bud was the hero of the occasion. The man whose coin he had usurped was glad to accept Bud's apologies and in the eyes of the women he was a veritable martyr. He could satisfy them only by accompanying them to the near-by private hospital where his bruises were treated and it was learned that the injured woman was not in a serious condition.

Then to the police station where it was easy for Bud to identify and recover his property. To his delight his surmises had been correct and not only had the young captive carried the knife and watch, but had the envelope containing the precious bonds as well.

Bud went home to a clinging mother and a wide-eyed Julia, the sister to whom Bud was a young god straight from Olympus. Modestly he regaled them with the story of his exploits and it was late before anyone thought of retiring.

CHAPTER III

BUD'S GREAT IDEA

All the world loves a hero.

Lindbergh found that out right after his splendid air exploit and Bud discovered the same truth the morning after his turnstile experience.

He had many of the great aviator's traits of character: his daring, his spirit and pluck; and a modesty that made him shrink from the publicity heaped upon him.

Newspapermen love news that is spiced with human interest. They found it in the story of this alert young man who had thought clearly, moved patiently and acted adroitly. One of the more sensational of the tabloid dailies went so far as to arrange a pictorial layout showing the store in which the young hero had been robbed, the turnstile with "A" and "B" to show how he had wedged it, and pictures of the surly youth grimacing at the world from between jail bars and of Bud smiling somewhat doubtfully and openly anxious to get away.

Mr. Gilroy said little of the exploit but it was

on his advice that Bud avoided mentioning the hat cleaner's shop until they could "get a line on the owner." Also, because of Mr. Gilroy's pointed request, the connection of the young hero with the detective agency was left out, even though that would have added zest to the "live" copy the newspapers built up.

Bud, sitting opposite his chief, in the luxurious, dignified private office, with its huge leather armchairs, dark rug, wide desk and neat file cabinets, listened to his superior's cautioning and then bent forward.

"Mr. Gilroy," he said, "I wonder if you will advise me about something."

"Gladly." Mr. Gilroy had many men under his eye, and he always made it a point to study and know even the least important cogs in his busy offices. He had found this office clerk quick, alert, active: had given him small, unimportant bits of detective work to do and then had trained him a little in trailing, for he found Bud cautious, eager to do his work thoroughly, and showing promise of a growing ability to think quickly in an emergency.

"This is my idea," Bud explained; "there have been a great many hold-ups and store robberies in my district ——"

"All over the city, for that matter," said his chief.

" Yes, sir. Well, the police seem handicapped —at least, they have not stopped the crime. I know they are almost too busy to give every case full attention, because they have to cover a whole city and take care of every sort of crime.

" You, Mr. Gilroy, have to make your living from fees, so you cannot give your time to small matters where there is no fee.

" But there are three—no, four!—chums of mine who are just as eager as I am to end the crime wave in our section: I have thought we could do something—patrol, watch out for suspicious characters, trail, and if we were organized about it, we could get somewhere, maybe. I would like to have your opinion of my idea."

" If you don't offend the police or interfere with them, and your friends are serious, not making it simply a game ——"

" Oh no! They wouldn't. My chums are all ' real fellows.' They would be able to trail, to keep watch, to patrol ——"

" Do you think," asked his superior, " that you have the qualities you would need—I suppose you would be the chief—have you quick observation, for example? "

"I have, sir. I don't just 'see things.' I pay attention ——"

Mr. Gilroy flashed him a quick glance. "Oh —you do! Well ——" He waved a hand toward his file cases.

"How often have you seen these files, Bud?"

"Oh, a lot of times."

"Now—don't look over. Keep your eyes on me. And tell me: How many separate drawers are there?"

"Twenty-six."

"One for each letter of the alphabet, eh?" Mr. Gilroy smiled.

"No, sir. There are only twenty-four for the alphabet. X, Y and Z are all on the last drawer."

"Then what made you say 'twenty-six'?"

"You asked how many 'separate' drawers—and two of the alphabet drawers are only half-size. They are 'H' and 'Q.'"

Mr. Gilroy leaned forward suddenly.

"Why do you say they are half-size?"

"They go only half-way back. There are private drawers behind them and those are locked."

"You have used your eyes," said Mr. Gilroy, then rising, he came over and put a hand on

Bud's shoulder. "Or—Bud, those half-size compartments move out only a little way. How did you find the catch which holds them?"

"I didn't find it."

"Are you sure?"

Bud looked up, clear-eyed, and nodded.

"Certain-sure, sir. I noticed you, one day, take out drawer 'H' and unlock the private one behind it to get something."

"Then how did you know about 'Q'? You looked?"

"No—first you pulled 'Q' out part way, hesitated, pushed it back and opened the other."

"You are observant and no mistake," commended his chief returning to his seat.

"Thank you, sir," said Bud.

The advice he gave Bud thereafter would have been worth anything he might have chosen to ask; Bud got it without cost, but he valued it at its true worth. Deduction, observation of tiny things, the reading of clues, the value of keeping one's head in a tight place—these and many other points were covered.

"And you'll do well to consult me before you take any actual steps," he finished. "In the case of that shop owner, for example. I have had him looked up. He used to run a junk place on

the East Side. There he was a 'fence.' You know what that is, don't you, Bud?"

"Yes, sir. A 'fence' takes stolen stuff and gets rid of it."

"It amounts to more than that. He takes it, yes. But he gives the criminal a mighty small part of its value. He disposes of the stolen stuff at a good profit to himself. The criminal takes all the risks and gets practically nothing for his pains."

"I often wonder why he does it," said Bud. "That young fellow, for instance, who took my things."

"He may have been lazy and hated work. He may have thought he could get money easily. But he has soon found out what they all find out in the end—it is harder to keep out of jail and eat three meals a day than it would be in a regular job of honest work.

"He may have gotten into crime by going with the wrong sort of companions. Sometimes a fellow does that and suddenly wakes up to discover that he can only save himself by a real effort. If he drifts from idle fun to mischief, from mischief to petty crimes, the first thing he knows he is in the toils.

"Again," continued his chief, "he may have

thought there was a ' thrill ' in it. It looks easy. There is a glamor, that's true. But it is all false glitter. Once a fellow is in the crime mill he finds it is sordid, dangerous business and the mill grinds him up and flings him into a cell."

CHAPTER IV

BLACK MASKS

Bud chose four from among his many friends to be entrusted with the carrying out of his idea.

Jerry was first, of course, for even though Jerry no longer lived in the same apartment house with Bud, the two had been bosom friends all their lives. Bud had not seen so much of his chum since the latter moved away. This new interest would draw them close again, and that was what Bud wished, for he knew that Jerry, fine lad that he was, could be easily swayed by companions such as composed a certain unruly gang in Jerry's new neighborhood.

With Jerry and the three others Bud sat in his own cozy room, discussing his plan.

"It certainly looks good to me," commented Jerry. "We can run down the fellows who held up Mr. Brown's. By the way, Bud—I never did get that birthday tie!"

"We will run that down first of all. I forgot all about it that night. I'll walk over with you."

"I still can't see," spoke up Miguel, a fiery,

active young man of Spanish parentage, "why you didn't yank out your knife and give those fellows a tussle at Brown's."

"If it had been Miguel, now," broke in Mark, a tall, talkative youth with a vivid imagination, "just think what would have happened. Picture it! In comes Mig' and the men grab his papers. 'Carr-rr-*ram*-ba!' squeals Mig' and comes at them with a stiletto, a bowie knife and a cleaver in one hand, a machete and axe in the other, and a buzz saw between his teeth ——"

"Please don't forget the broadsword," begged Miguel, grinning.

"But think, if it had been Tubby," went on Mark, turning his wit against the plump member of the group—never otherwise addressed. "Why did you ever pick him for a peace patrol?"

"M-mf!" grumbled Tubby, reaching for a cookie from the stack Bud's mother had provided, "I can watch people—from bakeries!"

"Well, then, picture Tubby—in he goes to buy a tie, one hand clutching a teaberry tart, the other nursing a cream puff. 'Your money or your life,' warbles the beastly bandit. 'Take my shirt,' urges Tubby, 'but spare my cream puff!'"

"M-mf!" was the only retort. Mark removed the plate of delicacies but Tubby made a sudden sweep of his hand and though the plate was gone the cookies stayed in his lap.

"That's what I wanted Tubby for," Bud explained, paying no heed to the byplay, intent on his idea. "He can keep an eye on that foreign shoe and hat place; he knows the owner of the bakery opposite ——"

"He ought to," said Miguel, "he almost lives there."

"M-mf!" grunted Tubby.

"And you, Mark—and you, Mig'—will take the two sides of the avenue, talk to the storekeepers—not the clerks!—and check up on how many have been visited by strangers, see what they looked like, how many robberies have occurred in this section—and so on.

"Jerry will get me reports on all the fellows in that crowd they call the Avenue Gang ——"

"I can report right now. I go around with them some. They're all right!"

"I have heard differently," said Bud, thinking of the poor reputation the gang had among residents and storekeepers. "Well, never mind them, then. You can find out if anybody knows that fellow I caught. He's gone to the Reforma-

tory, I suppose, or will go as soon as he is arraigned. But if we knew his friends ——"

"And what will you do?" asked Tubby.

"I'll see Mr. Brown, then consult Mr. Gilroy and do whatever he says. He lives on the fees he gets for handling private cases; naturally he can't do this sort of work, but he is interested and will advise us."

"Well, let's go get that tie," suggested Jerry. "I have to get home." So the group broke up for that evening.

"Bud," said his mother as he passed her in the living-room, "will you walk home with your sister? Julie had to work late, taking stock. I'm a little worried, there are so many rough people in the avenue at night." Bud promised, and after visiting Mr. Brown, getting the tie Jerry wanted most, and explaining why he had dashed out so callously leaving the man still bound, Bud turned and parted from Jerry.

The furniture store seemed deserted when Bud reached it; but he knew that Julia worked in the rear office, and no doubt with stock-taking keeping them late all the clerks were there too.

They were! But Bud did not realize why.

He opened the door, glanced about, saw no one on the main sales floor, strolled blithely down

the wide aisle, passed the huge wall racks on which rugs were stretched for display—racks which had hinges so the rugs could be swung into view and out of the way, like leaves of a vast book. And suddenly he realized that he was not alone, that a man had stepped out from between the rugs, that something menacing showed in his hand, and that he was motioning Bud to keep on, and with a meaning shake of his head indicating by finger on lip the need for silence.

Bud hesitated, half opened his lips. Up came the right hand to a level with his chest and an ominous click sounded.

The man meant business!

So Bud turned and went to the rear office quietly.

To Bud the situation had, besides its element of danger and the fascination of the unexpected, a touch of the bizarre.

To think that just a few yards away, outside that front door, the crowds of a busy shopping block were passing, jostling by, perhaps some of them even stopping to look at the furniture in the window. And here, in full view from the street, he was walking down the aisle between the walnut bedroom suite and the rolls of linoleum, and to anyone who might glance in it

would look as though a salesman were escorting a customer to the private offices.

He might make a swift rush around the heavy sideboard as he reached it, risking that no shot would be fired because of the inevitable disaster to whatever was going on in the private office right then; but he did not know but that Julia might be in that office; what might happen to her in such a case was the factor deciding him on quiet behavior until he knew conditions fully.

"Watch it, Bill," said the one with the weapon as Bud came to the office door, just a little ajar. "Here's a bird I couldn't stop. He beat it past me."

"Let him come," snapped a voice.

With a nudge of the hard muzzle he sent Bud into the office and went back to his watching. Should a customer come in he would, in the nonchalant manner of the weary salesman, show furniture, even take an order, while those inside ——

Bud's eyes took in the situation at the instant that he reached the door. Right beside it stood a tall, rangy fellow with a ready automatic in his right hand; this was trained on the two clerks and Julia who stood in a row against the further wall, hands elevated, while a second member of the invading fraternity relieved the men of valu-

ables and held Julia's handbag tucked under his arm.

By the safe knelt the proprietor of the store, fumbling agitatedly with the combination knob while the third of the invaders stood over him urging him gruffly to haste.

And on the face of each of the trio from the underworld was an all-concealing black mask with tiny eye-holes.

Nondescript in dress, in no way outstanding in appearance, any one or all of the three could join the lookout, step into a car, dispose of their masks and be lost to future identification, for the lookout would be the only one to be described and he would be dropped as soon as possible in a distant section, to remain hidden until the hold-up was no longer a sensation. A simple, easy method of getting rich quick? Then why the nervous tension, the feeling of restlessness, the urging for haste, that pervaded that small office?—it was the risk, the fear, the uncertainty, stalking side by side with the lust in each man's brain.

Bud was lined up with the others, after Julia's little warning cry had been stifled by a none too gentle hand and her brother took the end of the line farthest from her.

The safe was open and its contents swiftly removed, then two at a time the four along the wall were put back to back and prepared rope wristlets were slipped on and drawn tight, practically handcuffing each couple back-to-back as the third man at gun-point drove the quaking, protesting store owner into a tiny closet and slammed the door, while improvised gags covered the mouths of the rest. It was all done quickly and away went the trio, slamming the glass-paneled office door after an exchange of signals with the lookout showed them the coast was clear. The key slammed the bolt home and they were gone.

Bud had kept his wrists turned as they were pulled together so the rope would seem tight but the knot was not in reality as tight as it looked. Bud was relying on the evident nervousness of the one who had handled him for a slovenly job and lack of thoroughness. Now he was able to get enough play to manipulate his wrists and as the lock was thrown he was already working with his bonds.

Though it seemed an age, it really was only a brief interval before his hands were free, his gag snatched off. With a short reassurance to the others, tugging still, he tore off the rope com-

pletely and pausing only to make a shield of his coat against the splintering glass, he smashed his hand through the door panel and reaching through the opening, turned the key in the lock.

Up the store he fairly flew, to the door. People passing stopped and in an instant a crowd was collecting; Bud gave them no answer, no attention. His eyes leaped to and fro, looking for a moving car or the escaping of the men on foot. But what good did it do him; in the late evening cluster of parked cars and moving cars lurching forward to the beckoning of the green traffic lights, who could pick out a car to follow? He did not even know if they had used a car or if they had separated and dispersed among the crowd.

So he turned back, closing the door against the pressing tide of the curious immediately flocking to such a spot, hurried back to the office, freed the others, ordered police calls made and then gave his attention to his hysterical sister.

"Oh, Bud," she sobbed, "—my handbag! Almost two weeks' pay."

He soothed her as best he could, despatched the agitated clerks to guard the door and admit the arriving police, then returned to his reassur-

ances to Julia that the marauders would be promptly identified.

As soon as he had contributed his quota of information to the detectives sent in from the near-by precinct station, he hurried his agitated sister home.

CHAPTER V

CLUES AND A CLASH

"I HAVE some information for you," stated Tubby at the first meeting of Bud's peace patrols the next evening.

"So have I," Miguel rapped out eagerly.

"Here too," said Mark.

"One at a time," Bud suggested. "How about you, Jerry?"

"No report," his old friend said briefly.

"Then you, Tubby. Let's have your report."

"The fellow you grabbed in the subway turnstile!—his name is Rastus Dorkum, and that fellow who keeps the little shop is his uncle."

"Good work. That all?"

It was, so Miguel was called on for his contribution.

"Down my side of the avenue I found there have been three robberies; in the first, three people came in, and as near as we can check up, the same three were in the third. In the second case there were four."

"Still might be the same crowd, but more men

because of the size of the store—it was that way on my side, too," stated Mark.

"The descriptions I got of the men could fit some of the older fellows in the Avenue Gang," asserted Miguel. "Same on my side," Mark agreed. "We've compared notes, Bud, and it looks very much as if the Avenue Gang might be mixed up in these hold-ups."

"We have one corking good clue to go on, too," Bud informed them. "Julie had a gold powder compact in her bag. It was a curious shape, octagonal, and the cover was that *cloisonné* —you know!—looks like blue-green chinaware, sort of. But the thing is, if we can locate the compact and then get a look inside the cover. I scratched my sister's initials inside with my new penknife, last Christmas, before I gave it to her. A small 'J. B.'"

"Good clue," said Tubby.

"Great!" exclaimed Miguel, "we'll catch them now!"

"Oh, yes—right away!" declared Mark sarcastically. "Picture it! Mig' strolling along, sees a lady powdering her nose. 'Ah-ha!' grates Miggy, 'it is she—her fatal beauty is her snar-r-re!' And he grabs her powder box and whistles for six policemen ——"

"It is a good clue, at that," said Tubby, extracting a small cake from a bag in his pocket.

"Now, Jerry," Bud said, pulling toward him pencil and notebook, "about the avenue fellows —you have seen them a lot, I guess, living where you do. Is one short, and sort of ferrety looking? And is one tall—mighty thin and scrawny looking?"

"See here," said Jerry sharply, "what do you think I am? I have told you, Bud, that I know those fellows and they are all right."

"Yes, I know you have ——"

"But everything points to them," stated Miguel.

"Everything," nodded Tubby.

"What points to them?" demanded Jerry, whirling on Mig' who was up on his feet in an instant, excited as usual.

"What makes you so snappy?" he cried. "Plenty against them. That scrawny giraffe, Billy Gallagher ——"

"Here!" cut in Jerry, moving forward a step while he shook off Bud's restraining hand, "leave Billy Gallagher out. He's a friend of mine."

"Yeah? Well, and he's leader of the avenue crowd, too! How does that strike you?"

"Those fellows are all right, I tell you!"

"The store people don't agree with that," put in Mark.

"No they don't," Tubby commented.

"Well, I go with the avenue fellows and I think they are all right. What if they do have fun? Do you want me to stick around with a lot of mealy-mouths, a bunch of sissified young lads?"

"Wait, Jerry ——" soothed Bud.

"I won't wait. I think the avenue crowd is all right. They may get into mischief. Does that make them out to be thieves? No—and if that's the way you are going to run your detective idea, you can drop me out ——"

"Are you afraid to have us look into the avenue crowd's record?" demanded Miguel hotly.

Jerry scowled, put Bud's hand aside again.

"No!" he shouted, "nor mine, either. But you do the looking. I won't have anything to do with it."

He snatched up his cap and hurried out in spite of all Bud and Tubby could do to soothe him. The four remaining youths looked at one another despondently. Bud was the most dejected of them all.

"I'm afraid we aren't getting very far," said Bud.

"Well, I hate to say it, Bud," Miguel stated, "but you know how easy Jerry is—anybody can get around him. That avenue bunch has won him away from you. You might as well give up."

"No!" said Bud. "No!"

CHAPTER VI

JERRY

A CRUCIAL hour had come in Jerry's life although no one realized it, least of all the youth himself. Yet, as he sat in his small bedroom he felt strangely sullen and angry, very much alone and a good deal alarmed.

He could hear, coming from the living-room, the low rumble of men's voices, most frequently in curt, abrupt sounds from the throat of the stranger who was talking to his father. In pauses he could catch the sounds of stifled sobs from his mother.

He knew it was something that concerned him vitally. What it was he could not guess, which accounted for much of his fear.

His growing tension due to the suspense and uncertainty was cut off sharply by a curt summons from his father.

Slowly Jerry rose and forced reluctant feet to take him into the living-room where his eyes quickly drew the picture of his mother, in her low rocker, dabbing at swollen eyes with an absurdly tiny handkerchief, of his father, erect

and soberly aloof. He was more stern than his son had ever seen him before—and Mr. Hartley had never shown less than a stern exterior to his family.

Jerry's eyes drew quickly to a focus on the stranger, sitting on the edge of the chair opposite the silent father: stocky, coldly intent he looked, and Jerry had the feeling that his gimlet eyes were boring, probing, dredging into the very depths of his soul. Well—what was there to see? The young face hardened in defiance.

His father spoke tersely:

"This man wants to ask some questions. Answer him."

Jerry felt himself quailing. He sensed that it would be something about the avenue crowd, for quarrel after quarrel with his father had resulted from his obstinate association with them. And Jerry could not fathom his parent's resentment against them. They were full of what seemed to him innocent fun. Others called it by other names and there had been talk of appeals to city authorities by harassed store owners and avenue residents; that was why Jerry felt the swift return of misgivings as the man ended a long study, snapping the silence with a brusk question.

"Where were you to-night?"

"Out on the street."

"Who with?"

"The fellows."

Each sullen answer was followed by a pause during which his inquisitor held him with those seeking eyes. When Jerry began to fume and chafe, there would come a snapping, crackling sentence.

"What fellows?"

"Just the ones I usually go with."

"What are their names?"

Jerry turned appealingly to his father.

"Father, what's he asking me for—and why do I have to answer?"

"Never mind that, young fellow," cut in the stranger curtly as the stern man remained silent. "It will be better if you let me ask the questions and you answer—and answer straight. Come on," he urged, "tell me who you were with."

"Well—just Bill Gallagher and Joe Clark and that crowd ——"

"Umh-huh!" The stranger nodded as if this verified a suspicion already practically a certainty.

"Where did you go?"

"Just around."

"Where?"

"Oh, up on the avenue and around."

"Stop any place?"

Here was the climax, then: this was the important thing, for the man was bent forward, intent and watchful.

"Yes," said Jerry defiantly, for his conscience was clear, "we stopped in and had some ice-cream sodas—but we didn't do anything ——"

"Any place else?"

"No."

"Sure?" Those eyes bored through him—steady eyes, reading eyes.

"I've said 'no' once and I'm just as sure now."

The man studied him silently.

Jerry caught an appealing glance passing to his father from his mother but it was not acknowledged by the slightest sign. He stood by himself as far as any active sympathy was concerned.

"Pretty truthful, you say?" the man demanded of the father who nodded. Again the eyes swung into focus on Jerry.

"Well—I guess, maybe ——" He seemed to be reflecting aloud then an abrupt change came over him: he rose, stepped toward Jerry, who

instinctively recoiled. A question snapped like the crack of a whip.

"How about the Chinaman's?"

So that was it! The crowd had strolled up the avenue, "kidding" about the Chinaman and what they could do in his laundry, but Jerry had quit them without dreaming they would put their joking threats into practice.

"Oh!" he gulped, "I was in for collars—earlier—what ——"

"Never mind. Where did you leave the crowd—and when? How long ago? Careful, now!"

"I left them at my corner and came home. I've been here about an hour."

The querying eyes evoked a nod from Jerry's father. The stranger took up his hat.

"Maybe you did," he said, "but let me tell you this, young fellow ——"

"What did they ——" began Jerry eagerly, anxiously.

"Who said they did anything? Never you mind, as long as you say you wasn't there. And the less you're seen with that crowd from now on, the better for you, my lad." The stranger took his departure.

There was a stillness in the room for a long

moment: Jerry's mother rose silently and glided, handkerchief to eyes, from the room. A door closed very softly. Jerry lifted his eyes, drawn by his father's unwavering gaze.

"I've told you to stay away from them, haven't I?" said Mr. Hartley.

"Yes, sir." Jerry lowered his eyes.

"And we have discussed what would happen if you refused to obey once more?"

"Yes, Father—but ——"

"All right. Come ——"

Jerry winced, then tensed. In spite of the cold attitude of a man who had himself been brought up under the rule of an iron will, this father of Jerry's was an idol to his son—except when—and it was not frequent—he resorted to a form of punishment justified to himself only by the assertion that it had made a man of him and would do the same for his son.

"Father!—I'm too old to be beaten ——"

The strap was raised. Jerry burst into a frenzy of expostulation, his youthful pride outraged.

"Don't you!—I won't take it!—I'll leave home ——"

Sobbing, furious with a rage such as he had never felt before, Jerry broke away and rushed

out of the door, sending it shut with a fierce slam. His father laid aside the strap and sat down: his mother, entering a little later, did not ask where her son had gone. Discipline, to her, was the right of the father over his son.

Jerry did not realize where he was going or what he was doing until many weary blocks wore down the flame in his soul. Then, aimlessly, he wandered back to his own neighborhood, to find it deserted by those he had called friends, all gone to cover.

He met the hat store owner and that swarthy individual told him the story of the crowd which had gone to the Chinaman's to tease and annoy. After the celestial had run out of his laundry in pursuit, he had returned to call up the police and complain of a looted cash register. The man whose inquisition had resulted so sadly for Jerry must have been a "dick" or city detective, thought Dorkum.

Jerry knew no place to go; he could not bring himself to face Bud now. After weary plodding he found himself in front of his own home and in dull apathy he climbed the stairs to the top landing of the apartment house and there, secure from any likelihood of observation since no one went to the roof during the night, he spent

dark hours in discomfort of body and agony of spirit.

Bud—alone of all Jerry's associates ready with sympathy, eager to give the handgrip of fellowship—was scouring the neighborhood in search of his old chum. But Jerry was more eager to endure the solitude than to face the clear eyes in which he dreaded to see the censure of one whose trust has been betrayed.

With emotions far from Jerry's estimate of their character, only desirous of cementing the old ties, Bud sought—and quested in vain. At last he gave up. Thrice having found no Jerry at the home door, Bud missed his friend by the thickness of that door as, head bent in chagrin, shoulders drooped in sorrow, Bud passed the apartment house within whose portal Jerry had stood, disconsolate, despairing.

CHAPTER VII

IN SEARCH OF EVIDENCE

MIGUEL met Bud on the avenue corner, several evenings later.

"I hate to say this, Bud," he began slowly. "But, in fairness, I think I have to."

Bud braced, wondering what was coming now.

"It's about the Chinese laundry robbery. I got some versions of it from the stores opposite the place; but, also, I got a story from an eye-witness." He paused a moment, then resumed: "And it is not anyone who has a thing against—Jerry."

"Jerry!" exclaimed Bud. "What is it? Who told you?"

"This is what it is. Around nine o'clock Jerry went into the laundry and stayed a little while. He was not seen to come out. Soon afterward some of the avenue fellows came there, all skylarking and kicking up a fuss.

"They stopped and started to tease the Chinaman. He ran out to chase them, and when he went back he set up a yell that his cash register had been ——"

"It wasn't Jerry! He must have gone out before."

"I didn't want to ask anybody that. The eye-witness, Bessie Gallagher—sister of Billy—told me. She wanted to shield her brother, I figure it."

Bud was dumb. He couldn't—wouldn't believe wrong of Jerry.

"Well," he said finally, "you start hunting Jerry for me. You go down, I'm going up the avenue. If you find him, get him to come over to my house and wait for me!" He heard Miguel agree and start off, then Bud turned and walked on leaden feet along the avenue.

Before he realized it he found himself in front of Ching Moy's laundry.

"I'll go in," thought Bud. "I can get my own collars, just as Jerry probably did."

He found the Chinaman affable, as usual, with him.

"You know Jerry?" he began.

"Jelly? Oh—huh!" It was just an ejaculation but it meant yes.

"Has he been in here lately? I haven't seen him for some time."

"Ho—huh!" Again it was said with a nod of agreement.

"When?" asked Bud.

"Huh?" it was a question. Then a look of surprise came into the usually unexpressive face, and of a sudden the Chinaman screwed up his eyes in a stare of anger.

"Ho!" he shouted, "Jelly! Lat's light! Jelly he come time I get lobelly!" So he had been there near the time of the robbery.

Suddenly the Chinaman started around the small counter.

"Where you going?" demanded Bud sharply.

"Telleflome police. Jelly he here. No see Jelly go 'way!"

"Wait!" said Bud, catching his sleeve. Outside a burly man on the sidewalk paused, then turned and walked into the laundry.

"What's the excitement?" he demanded as Ching Moy sought to get his sleeve free from Bud's clinging fingers.

The Chinaman launched into a vociferous squealing account of the robbery, stating that he had not seen Jerry depart.

"Wait, now—hold your horses," said the man bruskly. "Who are *you,* young fellow?" Bud identified himself. "Oh! Yes! You got that Dorkum. Well, I'm Burkey of the city detective force. Now, Ching, listen to me a minute. I

checked up at the bank. It was open at night—for deposits. And *you made a deposit* just before half-past eight—before that Jerry came here."

The Chinaman seemed to be taken aback. He quieted down. Burkey gave him some advice about making up things to "get back" at the boys, warned him to go slow in accusing anyone of theft, then turned back to Bud.

"If you know that Jerry and have any influence, get him away from the Avenue Gang," he urged. "He's a good lad, I figure, but easily misled. Those fellows may get themselves into real hot water if they keep on. I'd hate to see your friend in it with them."

He turned and walked out. Half a dozen people were at the window, attracted by the Chinaman's excited squealing a moment before.

"By the way," said Burkey, returning to Bud. "See! Out there! He got off. Mother begged for him and he promised to be good. They put him on probation, and there he stands."

Bud looked through the window. Beside Bessie Gallagher, whom he knew by sight, glowering in at him balefully stood the young man from whom he had recovered his bonds—Rat Dorkum.

CHAPTER VIII

INITIALS

Bud stared back into Rat's glowering face, and then smiled at his enemy cheerfully. He had half a mind to go out and speak, but changed his idea at once. No use starting trouble.

Then his eyes became riveted on Bessie. She had opened her handbag and drawn from it, after a moment's fingering of its contents, a small, partly octagonal, bluish-green object that, close to the white electric bulbs in the window, gave back a scintillating glow, like that one sees on fine china.

Bud did not waste an instant. He must see the inside of that compact. She had it open, and was dipping powder onto the small puff, holding up the mirror so she could see to use it.

Bud realized that to approach would create a scene, even though all but the two and a laggard boy had turned away. However, he was anxious to see that compact, and had in mind the fact that Burkey must be in sight and could be called in case of need.

But when he got to the sidewalk Rat was hurrying Bessie away, up toward her home. Bud stopped at a penny-in-the-slot machine outside the ice-cream parlor close by, and inserting a coin, began to fiddle with the push-lever, which, as usual, did not work. He did not care. He wanted to observe the pair at Bessie's doorway, wait until Rastus should leave her, for they were evidently saying good-nights. Bud sought no quarrel with Rastus just now. He wanted something else much more.

Presently he saw Rat slouch off up the street, toward his uncle's shop. Waiting until he was out of earshot, Bud hastened along to catch Bessie before she should go in. To his surprise she watched his approach and as he came up, Bessie, very trim and good to look at, in her tailored suit and close-fitting hat, smiled and bowed.

"Throw off the disguise, Hawkshaw," laughed the girl. "I know you. I left the confession on the parlor table." She held out two gloved hands, close together. "Snap on the handcuffs!"

Bud grinned sheepishly and went up on the step beside her.

"Yes, I've got you with the goods," he

dropped into her flippant mood. "But if you'll go quietly we'll forget the wristlets."

"I see myself!" she said, pouting impishly. "Any man who gets me has got to take me!"

"The cells are all full," parried Bud. "Let's have the third degree right here."

She gave him a long, appraising glance: her face sobered and the raillery died from her eyes.

"I should kick over a milk can about what you can learn from me," she said airily, but with tightening lips.

"Seriously, I do want to ask you a question, Miss Gallagher," said Bud soberly.

"Ask away," she said with mocking eyes.

"It's about that powder compact ——"

"Oh! ——" She favored him with another steady look.

"Where did you get it?"

"Who wants to know?" she snapped in the slang of the day. Bud hesitated as to the best course to follow and finally decided that the surprise attack would be best.

"It belongs to my sister, Julia," said Bud steadily. "Or one like it."

"Oh, it does? Certainly, Mr. Hawkshaw! So does the building with the tower Mr. Woolworth built on dimes."

"It has her initials in it. Have you looked?" He could apologize if he was wrong; but he was certain he was right!

"Initials?" she gasped.

The surprise had failed; but with a woman, budding or mature, curiosity cannot but succeed; Bessie opened her handbag and produced the compact. Rat had not given it to her, flashed the deduction through Bud's mind, else he would have taken it back before the one he must hate could have come seeking it; Rat could not have known about it, even, unless he had gotten it from his uncle who, in turn, would have had to get it from someone else. No; the circumstances all pointed to the direct line—Julia to Billy, Billy to his sister.

"Where?" demanded Bessie, bringing forth the golden trinket.

Bud took it, opened it, saw he had been right, and pointed to the minute scratches in the rim; Bessie bent close and looked. Then she lifted her head and regarded Bud steadily.

"Was your sister robbed?" she asked.

Bud nodded. She held out her hand for the compact but the young man pretended not to notice as he pocketed it.

"Where did you get it, Miss Gallagher?"

"You think Billy gave it to me," she asserted swiftly.

"I'm not thinking—I'm asking ——"

Bud was very serious.

"Well, Billy didn't give it to me!" she said it sharply, with a little nod of the head and stamp of the foot, not angry, but conclusive.

"Who, then?"

"Why, Mr. Hawkshaw!" she returned to the defense of her bantering sarcasm, "you should know all those things."

"I like to have you check my facts," Bud explained with a grin. "But if you are going to fence with me I will tell you what I know and show you that Hawkshaw is still King."

Mr. Gilroy's frequent talks had not been lost on Bud: he felt pretty sure of his ground as he delayed for an instant to marshal his thoughts. On a few shreds of fact he intended to build a case, much as city detectives "sweat" admissions from suspected persons only omitting the badgering methods these gentry sometimes used.

"Hurry up," laughed Bessie. "My feet are freezing."

"Cold feet," said Bud, loftily, "are sure proof that you know I have 'got the goods.' Listen!

"On a certain evening my sister was robbed

by a tall, rangy fellow—who might have had a mole on his chin ——"

Bessie Gallagher started, her lips tightened.

"The next evening William Gallagher, as reported by one of Hawkshaw's able men, 'throws a regular party' spending money like a sailor. Some days later his sister blossoms out with a powder compact marked 'J. B.' and ——"

The girl stared, wide-eyed; then her chin began to quiver and as swiftly she recovered and flashed fire from hot, angered eyes.

"What's up?" came a voice from the hall. "Sis, what's the matter?—Well, if it isn't our dear busybody! ——" Billy Gallagher came out, and behind him showed the forms of several of his comrades. "I've heard about you, Bright. You'd better watch your step!"

Bud was taken by surprise but not in the least alarmed by the change in the situation. He swung sharply on Billy with the curt demand:

"What is Miss Gallagher doing with my sister's powder compact?"

Billy glanced swiftly toward Bessie and saw anger; he looked at Bud and caught defiant challenge. Behind him, in the press of the friendly companions he felt championship. So he stepped close to the common foe and blustered.

"Who says it is your sister's?"

"I do!"

"You better take it back! It's not."

"He's been cross examining me like a district attorney," stated Bessie snappishly.

"Who has?" cut in a coarse, gruff inquiry from behind Bud. His eyes, turning sidewise, caught the face of Rastus Dorkum sidling up to cut off his way to the sidewalk.

"Oh, it's little Bright-buddy," he growled. "Sending some more news to the papers, huh?" He laid a hand on Bud's shoulder.

Bud realized that he was in a tight corner; also, he sensed the hostility of Billy and his friends as clearly as he saw the open animosity in the dark face just beside him.

"Been nagging you, huh?" asked Rat of the girl. She nodded and Bud felt the grip on his shoulder tighten.

Everybody was very still. The air was pulsing with currents of hate, but on so public an occasion no one wanted to start the trouble. Rat was thinking, fast and cleverly—for him. With a quick swing he turned Bud and pushed him off the step.

"Go on—get away from here, quick!" he snarled. Bud recovered his balance and walked

slowly away; he was surprised at the freedom so readily his, a little inclined to return, somewhat baffled, but altogether convinced that the part of valor just now lay in retreat.

He had scarcely gotten to the corner when the girl gripped her brother's arm.

"Billy—that compact was marked and he's walked away with it!"

She began to whimper while Billy started forward. Rastus put a restraining hand on Billy's arm.

"Slow, Bill. Don't cry, little baby-girl. He's walkin' off with it—yes. But he's walkin' straight into a trap!"

CHAPTER IX

A TIGHT PLACE

As he walked down the street Bud realized that he had accomplished something, but not very much, as a detective. Truly, he had located his sister's compact, and had it in his possession; also, he knew who made the link between the mischievous Avenue Gang and the more sinister criminals who were really doing the robbing. Bud began to feel very certain that they were distinct groups. The young men of the avenue were too open in their mischief, as in the case of the teasing of the Chinaman. If they had just accomplished the hold-up of Brown, and the other crimes, they would be "lying low."

As he turned a corner, his eyes roving in search of Jerry once more, a panting, breathless youngster came hurrying toward him from a side street.

"You are Bud Bright, yes?" asked the breathless boy.

"I am."

"Jerry say, meet him. I show you, yes?"

So Jerry was in hiding! Bud followed the boy without further question as soon as he

realized the lad was too much out of wind to talk and to hurry at the same time; Bud preferred the haste.

Presently he was conducted to a small shack, an old, disused building at the far-in corner of a large, vacant lot, used as tennis courts in summer, flooded with water and allowed to freeze for skating in winter. The boy indicated the shack and turned to hurry away. He had earned Rat's dime.

Bud wasted no time crossing to the small, dull lean-to with its dirty window, high up, its creaky door. He had seen it often; this was his first visit to its interior.

He opened the protesting door, stepping into the dusty, dim interior. The door slammed shut swiftly behind him, and at the sound he swung around. Rastus had been hiding behind the door as it opened, panting with his exertions to reach the place ahead of Bud. It was his hand which had slammed the door.

"Here!" came a low, but sharp voice, from a corner. "Cut the noise, you!"

"Hey," said Rat, lowering his own voice to a whisper. "That you ——"

"His-st!" warned the voice and Rat stopped. "Yep, it's us."

Bud made a leap to get to Rastus, for he knew without asking that no Jerry was here. He had walked into Rat's trap.

The leap took him up to Rastus, but at the same instant a form struck him from behind, two arms clung around his neck, a hand was over his mouth. The impact, added to his own plunge, took him up to and against the door with a heavy thud that almost knocked the wind out of him; but the hand over his mouth made the escaping breath exhale in a grunt instead of the shout for which Bud had been planning. He began to squirm, to use his muscles to their utmost capacity, for Rastus also was upon him.

But the struggle was useless for there were three pairs of hands clinging, squeezing, cutting off wind and blocking movement in that black little hut.

A form taller than either Rastus or the man who had leaped from behind, whipped out a handkerchief and Bud's jaws were forced open; as expertly as the gag was fixed, ropes from tennis stakes in a corner were flung around his wrists and feet and drawn tight.

" He's set, now," said a low voice. " Rat, what do you want him here for? Whadda ya mean, bustin' into our bunk? This noise might bring

the bulls and you better not be the one tuh do that."

"He's got that powder 'do-flicker' what was took off'n that girl in th' furniture store that night," Rastus declared.

"Then git it off'n him an' skip outa here."

Swift fingers explored his pockets and Bud knew that the powder compact, his only evidence, was gone.

"I think we better beat it out o' here ourselves," said one of the men. "Rat's spoiled this place for us."

"It's most time to start, anyhow," answered another, deeper, tone. "What you goin' ta do wit' him, Rat?"

"Them fellers I been runnin' with, they're comin' along. I'll stick here with him if you're sure he's tied good. When they gits here we'll train him not to bust into no society where he ain't got no business."

After a few more low words the door opened, and in the dim light from the sky Bud saw a tall silhouette, and a shorter one, pause for a moment, then step away, while Rat shut the door gently, turned and gruffly stated:

"Now, Mr. Smart Eleck, you're goin' ta get what you need."

CHAPTER X

HEADWORK

THREE amateur sleuths looked at one another dubiously.

"Ten o'clock," said Tubby. "Here we are—and where is Bud? No wonder his mother is worried."

They stood on the steps of the apartment house where Bud lived. Miguel had met the other two there after a fruitless search for Jerry. In truth, Jerry was visiting the homes of some people he had not had much to do with—but that comes later!

"I think we ought to do something," Miguel said uneasily.

"I think you ought to have stayed with him," reproved Mark.

"Well, don't let's fight about that," urged Tubby.

"Right," agreed Mark. "Bud may be held prisoner somewhere—think of it! Tied hand and foot. Picture that ——"

"Stop that!" snapped Tubby, "and use your

imagination to think up something we can do about it."

"What can we do?" demanded Miguel. "When I left Bud he was on the avenue. He was hunting for Jerry. Now we know just where that would take him, don't we? Here, yonder and in between. I think we better scatter all over the neighborhood and then meet some place and compare notes."

"You talk as if we won't run onto him—'compare notes,'" said Mark.

Miguel was silent for an instant, then he started off, followed by the excited Mark. Tubby called them back.

"Wait," he urged. "Take it easy."

"What for?" demanded Miguel. "We've got to get going."

"Well, I'm no good at racing around. I'm too fat——"

"That's your hard luck," cried Miguel. "But we can get around——"

"Easy, now," said the stout youth. "I've found out a lot from listening to Bud tell what Mr. Gilroy has told him. Not only that, but I think it's silly to rush off on a wild goose chase. We've found out nothing by going on the avenue; we got no news at Jerry's—he wasn't even

there, nor his folks. Now, instead of wearing out our legs let's wear out our brains a little."

Tubby had almost never made so long a speech, and this, as well as his earnestness and the logic of his appeal, arrested the two eager and more agile members of the band.

"Well, get 'em working, then!" ordered Miguel impatiently.

"That's it," said Tubby. "You can see the legs going but you can't see the gray matter whirling around; but it's doing that right now. Here's the first whirl: Bud said, once, when you want to pick up a trail, put yourself in the place of the fellow you're after, try and think what he would do in the set of circumstances you've got to go on, then sometimes you can hit the very idea he had. Now here's three of us. Let's each consider what Bud was up against and after we think a while we'll see whose idea sounds the most logical."

There was a silent space during which each face looked very stern and every mind concentrated on the problem.

"I could think faster and easier if I had a cream puff," said Tubby. Mark reminded him that one doesn't think with the stomach, and after a little more consideration Miguel spoke.

"Here's my idea," he stated. "If I was Bud I'd find Jerry and he'd tell me he never took anything from the Chink and I'd laugh about it and be so glad I'd go with him to a show and that's what I think they did."

"Not my idea at all," exclaimed Mark. "Here's what I have worked out: If I had been in Bud's place I would have pictured it all in my mind, with all the evidence, and it would have looked as if Jerry had hid in the Chinese laundry but I couldn't believe that of Jerry so I would discard that theory. Then I would think that if Billy Gallagher or Joe Clark or any of them had been in front of the laundry they would know if Jerry was inside, and if it was me I would go and find them and worm out of them just what they knew ——"

"If—and if—and if!" snorted Miguel.

"Your idea was all 'and'!"

"Well, fellows," remarked Tubby, "both of you worked it out pretty good. I won't say my idea is better, or even as good, but this is it: Now remember, I am Bud. All right. Miguel tells me about Jerry and the Chinese laundry. I think about it and won't believe Jerry did anything. Finally I would get the idea: Why not see what the Chink has to say?"

"By golly!" cried Miguel. "That's an idea. Come on ——"

Off up the street fled the two agile runners; Tubby tried to match pace with them but halfway up the block his breath began to sound like the laborings of an engine pulling a train up a hill and he slowed to his customary walk.

By the time he reached the Chinese laundry his two friends were coming out. They told him of the session with Ching Moy who admitted Bud's presence earlier but knew no more than that he had left and after walking down the avenue had again passed the window going in the other direction.

"Tubby, you hit the nail on the head," said Miguel. "Think some more, will you?"

The plump youth grinned.

"Why did he come *back* past the window?" reflected Tubby. "Let's walk down a ways and see if we get the idea."

"Wait, now!" begged Miguel. "Maybe I have some ideas, too. I got the story about Jerry from Bessie Gallagher."

"Right!" said Tubby. "Bud would go to her right from the laundry, to check up what Mig' told him. Come on!"

For once the fat youth was in the lead, but

only for a moment. Miguel and Mark were at the Gallagher doorstep first.

Bessie Gallagher clicked the mechanism which permitted the lower, street door of the apartment house to open, then answered their ring at her own door. She recognized Miguel at once.

"More pumping?" she asked, holding the door open a little ways, allowing them to stand in a sheepish group around the hallway.

"We are looking for Bud Bright," said Miguel.

"He's chasing a band of desperadoes," she said airily.

"Then he was here to see you?" cried Mark eagerly.

"No," she announced. "And he had better not come here to call!"

And she slammed the door in their faces.

"Stone wall!" said Mark, dejectedly.

Tubby placed a fat thumb against the bell button and held it there steadily.

"He has been here—or she has talked to him. Else, why is she so snippy?"

The continued, unceasing b-r-r-r of a bell will usually get action of one sort or another. Bessie was, by turns, amused, annoyed, disconcerted, furious.

"Stop that!" Bessie cried through the closed door, "or I shall call the police."

Swiftly for one so stout, Tubby snapped an envelope out of his pocket and pushed it partly under the door so that about a half inch showed inside, so he figured. He held his own end of the envelope, and felt it move. Bessie was trying to get a grip to draw in what looked like a message. But not enough extended under the door to give her a purchase. She snatched the door open.

Tubby's foot was in the aperture as he said, quietly but sternly:

"Miss Gallagher, Bud started out to warn Billy—that's why ——"

The bait was taken.

"Warn him? What about?"

"Arrest!"

"Likely," she snapped. "He wants to arrest my brother ——"

"On your head be it," said Tubby, turning away.

Bessie caught at his arm.

"Wait," she cried, a little panicky. But Tubby, to the amazement of both Mark and Miguel, signaled for them to follow and clumped down the stairs. But only a few steps, to be out

of sight of the door; then he kept making clumping sounds, but on the same step.

After an interval that seemed ages to the mystified pair with Tubby, they heard Bessie call:

"Tommy—Tommy! Put on your cap and run to the shack and bring Billy here quick!"

"Come on!" cried Tubby, almost tumbling downstairs. "I know, now!"

CHAPTER XI

IN THE DARK

STEALTHILY, without a word, four or five figures had drifted in to shuffle softly through the dark. There were whispers, hoarse and excited, then a silence broken only by the nervous stir of a body or the heavy breathing of some dark form.

Bud's muscles were cramped, his jaws ached from the pressure of the knotted handkerchief. But this, at least, was relieved when Rastus bent forward and loosened it.

"If you yell, it's—good-night!" he snarled.

Bud worked his jaws to ease the ache and to see if they had frozen into one position, while a high whisper came from some over-stimulated member of the group:

"What you going to do to him, Rat?"

"Well, you know what he done to me?"

"But he's tied all up, ain't he?"

"What of it?"

There was a low murmur, and it seemed evident that the general opinion was against anything too rough; Bud decided to make a try to win this group from the avenue.

"Rat," he spoke a little thickly, his jaws not yet free of their pain, "you are on parole, you know!"

"Nix on the preachin'," growled Rastus. "We'll do the talkin'."

"Billy ——" said Bud, making a shot by chance.

"What?" was the reply, then there was a startled gasp; Billy had answered involuntarily, not with any willingness to disclose his presence.

"Ask Rat if I was talking to Detective Burkey to-day."

There was a deep silence; then Rastus spoke up.

"What of it?"

"I am talking to Billy," Bud said. "Bill, Mr. Burkey has his eye on you, and on the other fellows—Joe Clark and—others." He paused to give this a chance to be considered, then went on, "Now the very next thing that happens, there will be a 'round-up'—unless ——"

The silence built up into a strained minute, feet shifted, someone started to scratch a match, was stopped with a warning about showing a light. Finally Billy whipped out:

"Unless—what?"

"Unless I stop it."

There was a ragged spattering of incredulous laughter, and several sarcastic words were whispered.

"How could you stop it?" snarled Rat.

"I know—who—has been—robbing—all the stores!" Bud said very slowly.

"Who?" said Rat aggressively.

"I could put my finger on the 'spotter' who finds out all about the layout of the stores, when the owners are in, when the till is likeliest to be full ——"

"You can?" came from one unseen inquisitor. "Who is it?"

"Billy," went on Bud, paying no attention, holding the suspense he had created, "you, and the other decent fellows may play pranks and raise a rumpus, for fun. But I don't think you want to get mixed up with criminals."

"Here," cried Rastus. "Who says we are mixing up ——"

"I was talking to Billy. You are on probation ——"

"I'm going!" said someone out loud.

"So am I!" came another voice, and there was a scuffle and a push of rising bodies.

"Wait!" begged Bud. "Don't leave me tied."

"I'm going to untie him," snapped Rastus and the others fled hurriedly, Bud's picture of future dangers being more than they cared to contemplate.

"Well," said Rastus, stirring angrily, "now, you gay young 'dick,' I may be a 'spotter' but I'm goin' ta do some spotting I won't get nothin' out of but jus' pers'nal satisfaction."

Bud had been working at his bonds for the hour he had been lying there, and he felt that now was the time for a supreme test of his efforts. With a heave and a wrench he threw aside the knotted rope he had loosened about his wrists, but his feet were still securely bound. Yet he was able to rise to hands and knees, which he did as Rastus made his first attack.

He was jolted, surprised, by the grapple of Bud's hands around his legs; thrown off his balance, down he went. There was an interval of sharp breathing, while Bud worked desperately at the knots about his ankles.

Then Rastus came at him again, this time aware that his captive was able to use his hands. Rastus had a tennis stake.

Bud caught the blow aimed at his head by stretching up his arms and gripping the wrist of

the hand holding that stake. At the same instant he ducked his head sidewise, held fast to the wrist, pulled his assailant down on top of him.

There they threshed and rolled, gripping, striving, until of a sudden something hard seemed to rise from the floor and come at Bud's head as he rolled. It was the corner of the box on which the men had been lounging earlier that evening; luckily it had no sharp corner, yet the blow was sufficient to stun Bud.

His grip relaxed. Blackness swept up around him and the sides of the shack seemed to be coming down to press him into oblivion.

CHAPTER XII

JERRY DECIDES

JERRY was giving a party; it was an impromptu affair without any frills, but the guests were not sticklers for style.

His parents had gone on a week-end visit to relatives in a distant part of the far-flung city; all the pent-up energy of an active normal youth suddenly plunged into an eddy of life's stream, all his natural craving for the comradeship of his kind, had centered in his decision to let loose just once and have a real, bang-up Saturday night party.

Since the inquisition by Burkey and its consequences, Jerry had sincerely tried to live up to his father's wishes; not because of any sympathy from that stern parent, nor from any real fear of the detective; rather because Jerry had done some thinking for himself and, being naturally the better type of young manhood, he made this effort.

With the curious perversity of such conditions it seemed as though in trying to do right he

brought upon himself more unhappiness. This winning of new companions was hard; the better youth of the district kept away from Jerry.

A party, thought Jerry, would thaw things. Tentative word-of-mouth invitations were given, hesitantly accepted; these accounted for about eight couples, youth and maid paired by chance; but in the apartment as the party got into full swing there were no less than thirty-five young people.

It may be the custom in some circles to consider a party complete when all guests actually invited are there. In the city, however, custom is looser and the slogan is "the more, the merrier." One tells another, fresh couples "crash in" and nobody cares.

Such had been the case at Jerry's apartment. Jerry couldn't have told the names of everyone present; as a matter of fact he didn't even know the rather sharp-faced chap who had brought Bessie Gallagher.

The party was a "whale," everybody voted—except the tenants on either side of the apartment and the people who lived below. The radio was going full blast, its volume turned so high that the cone rattled and blatted; but who cared? They were dancing.

Jerry stood in the kitchen, inexpertly making up sandwiches by the expedient of mixing cheese slabs, sliced ham, and some relish he had found in the ice box. They were hungry, these thirty-four young folks, style wasn't as important as quantity. The coffee-pot was flanked on the gas range by a pan and a pot, both pressed into service as brewers of the fragrant beverage.

Rastus, in shirt sleeves, was there; so was the chap who had come with Bessie, though his voice was never raised in conversation, and a voice had to be raised to be remarked at all in the bedlam of squeals, laughter, giggling girls, shouting fellows, with the undercurrent of thudding, sliding, toddling feet.

"Jerry," spoke Rat, with deft fingers mixing a bowlful of what he had already scathingly termed "Prohibition Punch." "That lad you used to pal with—Bright—he's turned on you."

The sharp-faced fellow slicing bread was listening in the attitude of one who expected what was being said.

Jerry looked at Rastus in surprise.

"Turned on me? How? What's the reason?"

The ferret-faced fellow behind Jerry grinned a little, then sobered lest he should be noticed.

He knew Rat's motive, knew well that the young chap now on probation was doing him a good turn as well as some others by this subdued conversation.

"Well," said Rastus, coming closer to Jerry. "He an' his gay little pals has been checkin' up on you. Bright was in at the Chink's, findin' out was you there, an' when, an' why—an' them lads is tryin' to work it out that you an' the rest of us is in on them hold-ups an' so forth an' so on——"

"No!—Honest?" Jerry was surprised, a little; and yet——

"I'm tellin' you! That Bright lad follered Billy an' some of us up to the shack to-night and busted in an' started a rumpus. Then he tried a fight but he tripped and fell an' we left."

"Was he hurt?" demanded Jerry.

"No, er—nope! We left him gettin' up to run after us but he was a little shook up an' we got away. He's playin' in with—Burkey!" This last was a whisper.

Jerry was amazed. He said so, and in no uncertain terms; but Rastus called to Bessie, just in for a tray of sandwiches, "Didn't that Bright chap try to make out you had his sister's gold face-powder doo-dad?" She nodded, then see-

ing Jerry's dismayed face, she gave him a brief tale of Bud's badgering, never dreaming what lay behind Rat's query.

"He's layin' heavy on Billy. Me, too, of course! He thinks just because I fell for them bonds that night an' give in to a temp'rary temptation, I'm dirt an' worse." Rat made it emphatic.

"Now, Jerry," he finished, "we got to know which side of the avenue you think your friends is on. If you want to ride along with that Bright an' his nosey chums—all right, then your real friends will have to lay back an' see you suffer if any trouble comes."

"What sort of trouble, Rat?"

"Well, like if this Bright guy gets mean enough to frame things onto you. He's jealous 'cause you been runnin' with us. It's got him sore. A guy that will try to put theft onto a fine girl like Bess' Gallagher would do worse by you.

"But if you ain't on his side of the avenue, but on our'n, then your real pals will stick by you an' see that everything is hunky-dory, no matter what."

"I can't see why—why you think things ——" Jerry was not making sandwiches now; his whole

attention was on the crafty face of the acquaintance busily stirring the punch.

"Well, look here! F'r instance—hear them downstairs—knockin' on the steam pipes? We've been havin' it pretty lively up here. Your folks ——"

Suddenly it dawned on Jerry—his folks! The neighbors!—other people—the police! ——

"No matter what, Jerry, stick by your friends an' they'll see you through—no matter what!"

In the living-room the blat of trombone, moan of saxophone, twang of banjo and sigh of violin rasped crazily from an overtaxed radio; thrum of feet beat accompaniment; shout and screech, roar of merriment and high-pitched squeal of hysterical abandon. In the kitchen, a tense silence, two pairs of eyes surreptitiously scanning a youthful, rather frightened face.

"No matter what! If you stick. How 'bout it?"

"I'm with you," said Jerry a little desperately. "The way it sounds here right now—I guess I have to be."

CHAPTER XIII

IN THE SHACK

"Wait," counseled Tubby softly. "Don't let's mix the thing up now that we've got this far. Go easy till we see what's going on."

The trio crept cautiously toward the shack. At its door they listened but heard no sound; after a little hesitation Mark whispered that maybe it was all foolishness to be so quiet, and Miguel with his customary tendency for prompt action, thrust the door open—that is, part way. Something soft stopped it.

Mark secured and struck a match and in the glow, feeble though it was, they saw that what had stopped the door was a huddled form on the floor.

Miguel sidled through the opening, stepping over the still form, himself struck a match, gasped and then called.

"It's Bud! Wait till I get him away from the door."

It took a little interval to move their chum, then the others hurried in and by the aid of little

flares of bundled matches they examined the silent figure.

"He's alive," breathed Mark after an instant. "Let's get him on these tennis nets. Mig', run and get a taxi, we must get him to a doctor."

But at that moment their charge gave a little moan, then stirred and as Miguel hesitated, Mark ignited a card of paper matches, the flare brightened, the eyes in the white face quivered and then opened to blink dazedly at the light.

"Bud," whispered Mark. "Bud—what happened to you?"

Very slowly consciousness and strength flowed back into Bud's being. They waited and watched until, assisted by Miguel's alert support, the figure struggled to a sitting position and a hand passed uncertainly over the blinking eyes.

"Hello ——" he said rather thickly as Miguel under Tubby's direction hastened to get some water from the dribbling hose connection on the far side of the courts.

"How did you find me?" asked Bud after a while, taking a long drink of the water Miguel had brought in his improvised cup of rolled paper.

"We'll tell that later," said Mark. "Right

now, we want to get you home. Your mother and sister will be worried sick."

"No—not home—not yet," said Bud in a stronger voice. "I've got something to do first."

"Well, keep still now," urged Tubby. "We'll get a taxi and take you to a doctor. How—where are you hurt?"

"I'll be all right—just let me sit here a little while." He leaned back against a box softened by a clump of netting placed behind his head.

"It's a lot to tell, but I'll take my time," he said, and with the assurance that he had only stumbled and been knocked out for a while and was not seriously hurt, Bud, in little sentences and with many pauses, related the incidents of the evening.

"You'd better go on home," pleaded Mark.

"I'm going to Jerry's," stated Bud.

"You can't—not the way you feel."

"Yes," said Bud, "I am going there and tell him how Rat lured me here and what happened."

They remonstrated but Bud was determined; this, he claimed, was his one big chance to influence his friend, to cause him to see the dangers of the path he was treading; it might induce him to break away as Burkey had warned Bud his friend must do.

CHAPTER XIV

FAST WORK

A TAXI pulled in at the curb and Bud, Miguel, Mark and Tubby got out.

"Honest, I feel fine," Bud assured the others, obstinately denying their protests that he should go home and see Jerry later. "I want to get to him right away," he said.

He would not let any of them accompany him. The taxi went in search of another fare; Bud left his companions and hurried to the door of the apartment house and straight on up to Jerry's floor, while Tubby, Mark and Miguel, after a short conference, separated to do some private picket duty around the house. Miguel found the rear yard of the apartments easily and praised his luck as he saw the fire-escape ladder, lowered for painting.

In Jerry's apartment all was noise and Bud wondered if anyone would hear his ring at the bell. Evidently so, for the door opened and he faced Bessie Gallagher, laughing over her shoulder at some gay sally from the dining-room.

"Oh!" she said in surprise as she recognized the arrival. Bud, too, was somewhat surprised to see her there and could not at once think of a salutation. So, as she drew her lithe form erect and held her skirts aside as though not desiring to obstruct his entry and yet hating to be touched, even, by him, Bud passed her with a little bow.

Everything was free and easy at that party, and to Bud's dismay a hilarious, tousle-headed imp of a girl rushed down the hall and caught him by the arm, dragging him with her. "Come on, boy," she squealed in his ear. "My boy-friend is mad at me. Let's go!" and into the whirl of the latest fox-trot from one of radio's crack orchestras she half-dragged, half-coaxed him.

Past the dining-room table with its load of "parked" couples, Bud, falling into the mood of the gathering until he could get his bearings, guided his self-possessed partner. The floor was full of swinging bodies, some cheek to cheek, some locked in a seeming death-grip, a few doing their steps in the dignified manner of the high class dance hall. Elbows jostled, hips nudged but Bud made decent headway through the kaleidoscopic swirl of color and fun.

Into his mind filed a methodical appraisal of

conditions while he outwardly grinned, answering his partner's supposedly witty patter with gay and satisfying retorts. Over there on the table sat Joe Clark and a girl Bud didn't know; here and there he saw others of the avenue crowd.

From the kitchen came a ferret-faced fellow with a tray of edibles which he set down as he rejoined the waiting Bessie. Bud recognized him, one of the men he had seen in the shack. What was he doing here?

The neighbors were rapping on the dining-room wall. Nobody paid the least attention; twelve o'clock was nearing and hilarity was unconfined. Since Jerry wasn't in sight Bud knew he must be in the kitchen and as soon as he decently could he turned his partner over to her sulking escort and started kitchenward. At the hallway door he ran into Rastus Dorkum.

"For the love of ——" began Rat. "What—how'd you get here?" Very logical question considering that he had left Bud unconscious in a dark little building and didn't then care if Bud came to or not.

"I want to see Jerry," said Bud.

"Well, he don't want to see you ——"

Jerry, having overheard, came up the hall.

"Bud Bright," he said, stiffly. "You'll have to excuse me. I can't talk now. Don't you see I'm busy?"

"Yes, Jerry. It will just take a second ——"

"But I can't ——" exasperatedly. "Excuse me."

He made a move to pass by Bud and as the latter tried to put a hand on his arm, Rat caught the hand and flung it roughly aside.

A silence fell in the dining-room and swiftly communicated itself to the dancers and others beyond the archway; everybody was still with that peculiar stillness which sweeps over an assemblage when something goes wrong. Someone shut off the radio.

"It's midnight," said Bud, ignoring Rat's action and appealing to the frowning Jerry. "I think you'd better break this up, Jerry, before the neighbors call the police ——"

"Let 'em!" cried Jerry recklessly. "And if you don't like it you needn't stay, Bud Bright."

"What's come over you, Jerry?" said his friend disgustedly. "I wish you'd listen to reason."

"Reason! I'm too busy to listen to you!"

"Now we get another sermon," broke in Rat.

"Or maybe Hawkshaw is here to do his great

unveiling stunt," cried Bessie shrilly from the dining-room table.

"It's Bud Bright, the fellow who got in the papers," someone explained to a neighbor. "And that other fellow there is Rastus, the lad he had put in jail. There ought to be something doing."

"Hawkshaw! Hawkshaw!" the crowd took up Bessie's gibe. "Come on, Hawky, do your stuff!"

They began to crowd around, hemming in a quintet composed of Rat, Ferret-face, Bessie, Jerry and the young man who, his back to the doorway, faced them.

"Go to it, Bright-boy," screeched the girl who had grabbed him on his arrival. "I'll bet on you. Unmask the villain."

"If you had any respect for Jerry and his folks, you'd all clear out," said Bud crisply. "A party's all right till ——"

"Oh," cried a disappointed feminine voice, "he's not Hawkshaw, he's only just a reformer who hasn't grown up yet."

"How about it, Jerry?" asked Bud, beginning his appeal again. "Bust it up before there's trouble."

"No!"

"Didn't I tell you?" Rat said to Jerry. "I told you." Jerry nodded sombrely.

"Anything he told you must have been good," said Bud, losing some of his grip on his temper at Rat's constant interference. "Especially since he lured me to the old shack by pretending you were in trouble and needed me, and took my sister's powder compact that he was afraid I would use as evidence ——"

Bud paused. They were all listening. Rat laughed coarsely.

"Hooray for our side," croaked Rat. "Only for one thing ——" He turned and a wink passed from him toward the ferret-faced man. "Say! Let's give him the straight goods and just show this gay lad how clever he—ain't! What d'ya say?"

The other fellow nodded. Rat turned to Bud, drew something from his pocket.

"Here's that 'evidence,'" and he waggled it under Bud's nose. Bud reached for it but Rat held it away.

"Nope—it goes back to its owner in presence of all these ladies an' gen'lemen." He passed it over their heads to Bessie.

"I'm surprised, Bessie Gallagher," called Bud, as she tucked it into her dress.

"What at?" she asked flippantly. "I should fall off a ladder about you being surprised anyhow!"

"That's my sister's property and it was stolen."

Ferret-face came close in front of Bud and there was a menace in his eyes.

"When you say that you've got to account to me," he snapped.

"Why?" said Bud aggressively.

"I gave the lady that little gift."

"Oh—you did!"

"Yes—I did. If you don't believe it—show him where I put my 'nitials, kid," he suggested to Bessie. She held up the open trinket and several of those closest to her exclaimed.

"Your initials," cried Bud sarcastically. "Not for Julia Bright, of course. Oh, no, of course not!"

"Have you got any objection if I got the same 'nitials?" demanded the other. "But we ain't been interduced, that's so! Hey, Rat—give us a knock-down to this bird."

"Meet James—Jimmy Bailey, Mr. Bright," snickered Rastus while the rest of the party gave the discomfited Bud a regular, plain and unmistakable "razzing."

"Why didn't you tell me that," Bud appealed to Bessie, "this afternoon?"

"I wasn't at liberty to," she tossed her head, "even if it was any of your business."

"Say!" cried a voice. "Give 'im the rush——"

On the instant Bud realized that he was in a bad position; before him the young people were pushing the girls aside so that the males could form a solid front preparatory to the method of ejecting undesirables often resorted to in old-time saloons.

Bud moved swiftly, determined, even at cost of his reputation, to make his exit and avoid any further violence, principally for Jerry's sake. But Rat and the Ferret-face maneuvered so that they blocked his way.

They caught his shoulders even as the press of young fellows started toward him in his hallway.

A window rasped as the sash was thrown up, and into the mêlée cut a sharp, staccato command:

"Stop where you are! I've got you covered."

There were screams from the girls, shouts and exclamations from the men. Bud looked toward the window and saw a form half-obscured in the shadow outside.

"You—you Bright fellow—get from behind him, you!—get out and then I'll come in."

Bud wheeled swiftly, passed down the hall and out into the street, having scarcely touched the stairs in his descent.

"Now—everybody," said the voice, as the girls huddled together and the young men stood stiffly in various ludicrous postures, "I'll say—good-night!" The window slammed shut.

But not before Jerry had uttered an ejaculation of surprise, half relief, half disgust.

"Good gravy!" he cried. "That—that was only—Miguel!"

CHAPTER XV

CLIMAX

"WOODMAN, spare that tree," quoth Mark dramatically. "Spare every single bough. Last week they robbed Bud under thee and I must climb thee now!"

"But what for," he wondered audibly to Bud as the latter, with the poet and Miguel, who had recently come up, pantingly boosted Tubby till he could reach a limb and with much puffing and blowing, pull himself into the screening foliage.

"They'll come out looking for me—and trouble," replied Bud, wriggling himself up beyond the fat one's reclining and heaving bulk. "I want to be right handy but I don't want any of the trouble."

"Tubby located you, and Miguel saved you from a bad mauling—when do I get my turn to do something big?" demanded Mark as the boughs stopped shaking and the concealed quartet lay quiet.

"Any time, now," said Bud under his breath. "I'm getting the whole thing straightened out

in my head. Tell you later," he hissed sibilantly for quiet, as a knot of the youths from the party came out on the sidewalk and looked around.

After a little these went back into the apartment but the hidden ones obeyed Bud's whisper and remained where they were, for couples were departing, some still animated, others rather sobered, a few commenting in various moods on the ruse of Miguel.

"It's not every day that you can listen to what folks say about you," said Miguel under his breath as a couple crossed the street laughing and extolling his cleverness.

Pretty soon the street was again deserted and the youths came out of the tree.

"Notice this?" asked Bud. "Not one of the avenue boys has come out except Billy Gallagher who went in and came back taking Bessie along. I wonder what happened and how he got her away from the ferret she was with?"

Miguel surmised that Billy might have thought things over since Bud's appeal to his better nature in the shack. Mark contributed the guess that the kid cousin had told Billy about their scheme at the house and Billy wanted to get it straight from his sister.

Tubby made no comment, being too absorbed

in regaining the wind almost knocked out of him by a drop from the tree.

"Now I go back," stated Bud decisively. "I want to get Jerry out of there and take him to my own home before the police come. I'll bet anything somebody has called up, this much after midnight. If Jerry isn't there things will have time to cool, over Sunday, and maybe Mother can talk to his folks when they get back and it will be easier for him."

Up the stairs marched the four, treading as quietly as possible; outside the apartment door they stopped. Within, four or five lusty male voices were intoning "The Prisoner's Song" in several types of tenor, while spoons beat out the rhythm on tin pots or the kitchen range.

Bud pressed the bell; to the door came Ferret-face, but seeing who it was he slammed the door in their faces before Bud could get a foot in to stay its close.

At that moment an irate tenant came from the adjoining apartment. Seeing the boys in the hall he began to upbraid them but finally believed their sincere assurance that they were not of the party, rather friends of the host desiring to stop it.

Within there was an instant of deep silence;

had any of them been gifted with telepathic qualities he might have saved a catastrophe, for the one styled Jimmy Bailey had told of Bud's return. Rat had suggested, "Let's give him a reception," and before Jerry could intervene they were prepared. The noise resumed with redoubled vigor.

The tenant, saying something under his breath, stepped up and gave the door several resounding blows. Of a suden it was flung back and before anyone could take in the actual situation the reception intended for Bud was accorded to the tenant.

A chorus of cat-calls broke out and a shower of potatoes and other things not so raw nor so fresh deluged the man at the door. And among them something ornamental from the mantel, that sent him down in a pitching, groaning heap and followed him to shatter about his head on the marble tiles.

Quick as a cat, Bud leaped across the prostrate figure and ran up the hall, his footsteps the only sound as the dazed occupants took in the significance of their act; then there was a rush, and up flew the fire-escape window. Out and down fled the members of the party, leaving Jerry, dazedly, stupidly gaping past Bud to the man

over whom Tubby, Miguel and Mark were kneeling.

Racing steps pounded up the stairs and two plain-clothes men, followed in a few seconds by a stout officer in uniform, joined the group for a second, then came hurrying into the apartment.

The man stirred, sat up and looked vacantly around.

The details are needless. The upshot was that a subdued and horrified Jerry and a sober quartet headed by Bud and composed of his lieutenant, a patrol and a bakery habitué, were marshaled out to the sidewalk and, eventually, lined up before a grim but sleepy desk man at the local police station.

CHAPTER XVI

BUD'S WAY

THE Law is a terrifying thing. It rules by fear. That is why the police are so gruff and, sometimes, rough. That is why prisons are gray and gloomy and gruesome, why newspapers help to build up a picture of punishment that is terrible—and terrifying.

When anyone forgets decency, stops thinking along right lines, begins to skulk in the dark places and ignore the rights of others, it is too late to reason.

The police, knowing this, must have a weapon that will make the criminal stop and think—before he commits a crime! Terror of punishment, dread of mental tortures in lonely cells—these things are stronger forces against the planning of crime than all the persuasion in the world.

Because people are sometimes weak, sometimes thoughtless, the law, which would rather prevent crime than have to punish it, surrounds itself with a cloak of terrifying grimness, puts on

a mask of scowling anger and turns to the criminal about to commit his crime. "Beware!" it threatens.

The criminal pauses and thinks, and sometimes he stops in time. If he does not, there is a punishment as swift and as sure as Fate. Though not every crime is solved, not every offender caught the very first time, many and many are captured and punished who do not get a line in the newspapers. Plenty of clever detectives bag their culprits without a word that the public sees.

But the world of crime sees—and knows!

So the Law, administering sincere justice as well as it can, pretends a ruthlessness which prevents many a person from doing some wrong.

Bud, sitting with his three comrades under the chill watchfulness of the detectives, felt a touch of the ice in his soul as a cell door clanged; and the four youths drew instinctively closer together. And their consciences were clear!

What, then, the effect on Jerry? Strayed only a little from the paths of right, the seriousness of the situation made conscience cry: "Bars of steel—bars of steel—walls of granite—made to hold you!—bound to get you!"

Bud looked away from the suffering face of

his former chum with a sad heart; he, closer in sympathy than others, could see the depth of Jerry's misery.

The station house door opened to admit Burkey with Joe Clark, and after a while the other plain-clothes men came from a round-up with Billy Gallagher and several other subdued prisoners.

"Well, for the love of Mike—Bud Bright! How do you figure in on this?" demanded Burkey as soon as he saw Bud.

"Trying to give your warning to Jerry," said Bud simply.

The ponderous mill of the law began its routine, slowly grinding souls between the upper stone of Fear and the nether stone of Uncertainty; charges of assault were made by a Mr. Hastings, brother of the man who had been struck. Several angry tenants bore out the dreadful condition of the injured man.

And Bud, sitting by Burkey, turned with dry throat to ask: "Mr. Burkey, couldn't Jerry stay home with me over Sunday instead of being locked up in jail?"

The detective favored him with a stare of surprise.

"What for?"

"I don't know if I can make you see it," Bud hesitated, "but I'm going to try. Jerry is easy to influence, he's quick to fall into the way of the fellows—the folks—he's with.

"If they put him in—in that cell—with Joe and the others—they said they'd have to pack 'em in, there's 'a rush on to-night'—he will—I don't know how to put it; but look! If I could get him home where there is a clean bed—you know—and my mother to talk to—she understands a fellow and she has a big lot of influence with a chap like Jerry—at a time like this——

"Do you see?" he pleaded eagerly. "It might be the turning point for Jerry."

Burkey sat thinking about it for a moment.

"Yes—I see, young fellow. It's a mighty decent way to feel and I don't doubt but it would help the lad a lot. But we can't slam others into a cell and let your friend walk out. You see that, don't you?"

"Yes," Bud agreed, soberly. "But have they got to be put in cells? Isn't there any way——"

"The law's the law," stated Burkey, not unkindly. "These young fellows had their chance; we warned them several times.

"Besides," he took up his argument again, "look at it this way: If we could get them off

what would happen? They'd snicker about it and say we were easy marks and go right on in the old ways."

"Not Jerry! Oh, I don't think Jerry would. He's got a good fright out of this and if I know him—and I do, you bet—he is going to turn over a new leaf ——"

"If anybody else asked me, young fellow, I'd laugh at them, but you certainly are a friend to that buddy of yours ——"

Bud waited breathlessly as the face beside him bent till the eyes studied the gray, dull floor, brows puckered, forehead lined with furrows of concentration.

"Tell you what," said Burkey finally, "I'll give you a good word with Mr. Hastings, here, the man who is making the charge that's holding them, and I'll let you talk to the lieutenant on the desk. It's up to them."

Bud thanked him earnestly and watched as Burkey chatted with the man who had most against the young revelers, and walked to the desk where he and Mr. Hastings conferred with the man in uniform.

Burkey's beckoning finger summoned Bud. With quaking knees and a curious tightness in his throat he obeyed the call.

"This is Bud Bright, lieutenant," he introduced. "I'll tell you he's straight as a string and his record's clean as a hound's tooth. He wants to ask you something."

Thus put in the limelight, Bud gulped a lump of embarrassment and forced his tense nerves to steadiness as he marshaled his mental energies for the plea.

"I'm sorry your friend is mixed up in this," the lieutenant said after Bud had stated his case and made his request. "These chaps need a lesson. It's the lad's own fault that he is here. Burkey talked to him some days ago and told him to watch out."

"And he has," exclaimed Bud, eagerly. "He didn't go with the avenue boys after Mr. Burkey called."

"How do you know?" inquired Burkey.

"I've got reports on all the avenue crowd——" and then, as they interrupted with quizzing and surprise, Bud was compelled to tell of his own modest efforts in the detective line.

The lieutenant recognized Gilroy's name when Bud mentioned it and Burkey nodded, paying Bud the compliment, when he ended his modestly told recital: "Not so worse for an amateur, I'll say!"

"Guess this Jerry did stay away as you say—but he was with the avenue crowd to-night."

Bud turned to the lieutenant who had spoken. "I think, sir, it was the other way around. They were with him. You know how parties are, these days. I'm sure the avenue fellows heard about the party and collected their girl-friends and 'crashed' it."

Burkey crossed to Billy and Joe and questioned; when he returned his nod showed that Bud had been correct in his guess.

"What do you say, Mr. Hastings?" asked the lieutenant. "If you insist that the assault and public-nuisance charges go on the blotter the lads will have to hear that 'Lock 'em up for the night!' and that will mean till Monday morning. Bright is anxious to give his pal the one chance. We can't give it to him and not to the others."

"You haven't brought in the real ring-leader anyway," stated Bud. "I think Billy Gallagher is square and the rest too. It's really Rat you want—and the two fellows he knows from some other neighborhood."

"Well," declared Hastings, "I think these fellows ought to get theirs. My brother got his!"

"Look!" said Bud, showing his forehead,

swollen, black and blue. This naturally led to further questioning, and Bud had to tell the whole day's story which he did as quickly as he could, stressing Rat's part and intimating that the avenue crowd was simply mischievous, making the point that they were rougher in their actions since Rat had come with them, and giving Billy and Bessie an "out" by what he told about the two men in the shack and the subsequent materialization of Ferret-face at Jerry's party.

"They even had Jerry turned against me," concluded Bud. "If I can overlook all that for Jerry, can't you be easy on them, Mr. Hastings? Besides, that stuff was not aimed at your brother——"

"He got it, just the same."

"Yes," said Bud, "he did. But look at this please: You say he had called for the police; well, if he had waited for them to break up the party, instead of going to the door himself, he wouldn't have been struck. That stuff was intended for me."

"That's a point, all right," said Burkey quietly.

"Yes, I know," impatiently. "But this sort of carryings-on is bad for the community. You

never know where these parties are going to end up ——"

"Excuse me, Mr. Hastings," said Bud, "but you have a son, haven't you?"

"Yes." Surprised.

"He goes to parties and gives them, doesn't he?"

"Certainly! But not rowdy parties ——"

"This wasn't a rowdy party," Bud hastened on. "If I hadn't gone there to try to get Jerry to quit, it is likely that the party would have ended quietly and no harm done except some noise. Mr. Burkey urged me to warn Jerry for the future. After what was done in the shack I wanted to strike while the iron was hot, maybe face the ones who had the most against me, right before him, and when I did, things got bad—but it was Rat and his own crowd."

"I'm not interested, Bright. This friend of yours knew what he was doing when he started his wild party. He ought to take the consequences."

"He was trying to get back with the better crowd; the others 'horned in' and made the trouble."

Hastings walked away. "I think we're wasting time," he said.

"Please, sir—wait. Think if it was your son at a party, or giving one, and somebody did something to start trouble ——"

Mr. Hastings hesitated and turned back.

"—You'd want him to have a fair break, wouldn't you, sir?"

"Jerry didn't throw the ornament or anything. I saw him as the door was opened ——" he hurried on.

"So did my brother. His hand was raised."

"Yes, sir—but not quick enough to stop whoever it was whose arm I saw when the ornament was thrown."

"You'd naturally try to get him out of that."

"Mark, and Miguel, too, say they saw it wasn't Jerry ——"

"Well ——"

"Well, sir—if it was *your* boy accused of assault and it wasn't actually his work and you didn't know which one it was, how would you feel if somebody tried to claim it was?"

"You argue poorly, my lad."

"Maybe, sir: at the same time it means that if you insist on the assault charge and keep the fellows in jail, Monday we other fellows will testify that it wasn't Jerry, and all you'll get is the satisfaction of keeping him in a cell

and maybe seeing him fined for the nuisance charge."

"That might be a lesson to him."

"I believe he's already got his lesson," said Bud, feeling hopeless in face of this man's disposition to be firm about it.

"Sorry, sir," he said despondently. "I hope your boy never gets up against a man who is determined to start him toward the electric chair——" He turned and moved away with drooping shoulders.

"Here—don't be insolent! I'm not starting your friend toward any electric chair!"

"I hope not, sir," said Bud, pausing a few feet away.

"Well, I'm not."

"I know Jerry," Bud stated. "Easily led. With me—and our crowd—he was full of fun, happy, with a good disposition. I want to get him back to that kind of a life. You want to compel him to spend two nights and a day in a cell, to come out and face a lot of 'I told you so' from men and women and 'Jailbird' from his own friends. What would your boy do? What would any boy do? Would he say, 'Here's my chance to make a man of myself!' in that case? No, sir—I think he'd turn to the only people

who would run with him—the ones he got in jail with."

"It's the way a lot of them start ——" said Burkey quietly.

Hastings hesitated and turned his face away while Bud stood watching him. From bleak despair for his friend to warm, hopeful joy flew the swift changes of expression on his face.

"Tell you what, young man," said Hastings, "you've 'got' me, somehow. Maybe you're right. I'd hate to have it on my conscience that I'd given a lad a deliberate push on the wrong road. If it can be arranged ——"

It seemed that it could since the entries had not been finally made on the blotter. On their promise to take to heart the lesson of forbearance and not abuse it, the young men were to be allowed to go their ways, Burkey exacting a promise from Jerry that he would report every so often and turn in an account of his behavior and activities.

Bud having long since telephoned to reassure his family, he walked out of the station house with Jerry. Billy looked after them and turned to Joe:

"And he got us off! I'll be ——" what, he kept to himself.

CHAPTER XVII

JERRY'S CONSCIENCE

NEITHER Jerry, Bud nor the latter's three comrades talked much on the way from the station house to the corner where they separated, Bud taking Jerry to share his room.

Sunday morning the two slept late and when they came into the dining-room Julia had already gone to Sunday School where she had a class to teach. Mrs. Bright, who had retired but had not been asleep on their arrival the night before, greeted Jerry with that warm, matter-of-fact acceptance of his presence which put him at ease to an extent he had not felt for many days.

After the coffee cups had been pushed away at the end of a meal during which Mrs. Bright kept the conversation away from the topic really uppermost in all their minds, Bud apologized for the necessity of leaving Jerry for a while. He must hurry to keep an appointment, made with Mr. Gilroy, at the latter's home. Bud's employer was much interested in the young man and wanted to have the talk which press of duties at the office prevented.

Mrs. Bright understood Bud as well as he knew her; between them no word had passed concerning Jerry or his latest escapades. She sat down to glance over a newspaper while Jerry had time for some sober reflection. The paper he affected to be reading might have been blank for all he cared: his eyes kept seeking that small, white-haired and sweet-faced woman placidly swaying in her low rocker. The atmosphere was ideal for confidence; outside the windows the winter's first sleet tapping on the glass, within the room a cheerful sizzle from steam radiator valve, the coziness of a place that said "home" and meant it.

Finally: "May I talk to you, Mrs. Bright?"

"Assuredly, Jerry." She laid aside the paper she, too, had only affected to read. "It seems like old times to hear you say that—remember how we used to 'confer' around examination time?" She smiled gently at him and waited.

"I do," said Jerry, "and you don't know how I wish those old days were back. I've got an awful lot of troubles, Mrs. Bright. Maybe you won't want to take all the time I'll need ——"

"Jerry," said the gentle lady, "time doesn't matter. Tell me all you feel you want to."

So Jerry did. With a heart hungry for sym-

pathy and understanding, with a soul seared by experiences he could not talk over with his own kin, he let down the barriers and unreservedly poured out his story; told how he had found the boys in his new neighborhood "high-hat" and offish, how the avenue fellows had accepted him readily, how really innocent of harmful intent had been their pranks.

He verified what Bud had asserted, that the avenue crowd was not bad but that they had a reputation which worked against them; truthfully he related his talks with his father and brought his story to completion with a full account of the party, not excluding Rat's effort to wean him from and turn him against Bud. The session at the station house after the untoward climax of the party he spoke of haltingly, but when he told as much as he knew and guessed of Bud's successful effort to win his release, Jerry's voice carried admiration, as well as personal shame at his own attitude toward his old chum.

"My!" said Mrs. Bright, "you have moved over into a hornet's nest."

"And I wish that was all," said Jerry. "But now I have to face my father to-night—I don't think I dare!"

"Of course you dare, Jerry," she assured him.

"He can't be terribly angry about the party. What happened was not really your fault, not wholly ——"

"Not in any way," stoutly maintained Jerry. "I know whose it was. Rastus Dorkum's!"

"I wouldn't hold it all against even him, Jerry. He can't be all bad."

"Maybe not. But somebody is, and whoever it is they are influencing him; so it comes to the same thing."

"Well—not quite, Jerry."

"Whoever it is, they know that I know more than they want me to—and I think it was what I know that made them try to get me to give up old friends and side in with Rat's sort."

"You know something, you say ——"

"Yes, Mrs. Bright, I do. But I can't tell you about that. I don't think I ought to ——"

"It isn't anything criminal, of course ——"

Jerry looked very soberly at her. "Yes, ma'am—it is."

"You are not involved." She made it as a statement, not as one asking a question.

"No!" Jerry was very decided. "Rastus is, though—he hasn't done anything himself, but he knows who has and—I'd better not say any more ——"

"I understand, Jerry," she nodded. "It isn't that you mean to conceal any evidence or knowledge of crimes. You want to talk to Rastus and get him to stay away from that sort of life, I think."

"That's it," Jerry said. "In a way, like Bud with me. I've thought things out. I see Bud was right—oh, awfully right!"

"I'm glad," she said simply.

"I want to see Rastus and tell him I'm going to say what I know—no, I can't do that! I'll tell him if he gets away from—them—I won't tell—no, that wouldn't be right, either. One way I would be helping to get Rastus into trouble, the other I'd be concealing things I ought not to hide. Oh, Mrs. Bright—what am I going to do?"

"Is it really as bad as that? How did you come across this knowledge, Jerry?"

"Just through Rastus. He 'took a shine to me' he said, and took me places that the avenue crowd didn't always go, and as it sometimes happens, accidentally I found out—I can't say what, but Rat was afraid I'd tell and made me pass him my word—so naturally when Bud was trying (as Rat said) to make me 'hit the sawdust trail'—he meant turn over a new leaf and drop

him—he was afraid I would feel in duty bound to say something, I guess—so he has tried to get me to stick to his crowd."

"It's an uncomfortable position, indeed," she agreed, and quietly rocked for a while.

"Shall I tell you what I think?" she asked finally and on his urgent plea that she do so, Mrs. Bright continued, "It seems to me I would find Rastus and tell him I can't keep on as I am, and urge him to 'drop' whoever it is he ought not to associate with. Then I would explain that I won't conceal knowledge of wrong-doing under any circumstances."

Jerry considered it for a long while, then agreed that under the conditions there was nothing else to do. "I'll walk over and look for Rastus," he said rising, then his face fell again. "But there! I forgot about Father for the minute ——"

"I wouldn't let the evening worry me," she said quietly. "I thought of walking over with you ——"

He looked at her eagerly.

"Mrs. Bright—will you to-night? I'm not a coward, but Dad doesn't seem to understand—and we can't somehow find anything to agree about. If you would ——"

She nodded and smiled reassuringly. Feeling that a great load had been lifted from his mind, he left. But Mrs. Bright was not to see Jerry for a good many anxious hours.

CHAPTER XVIII

VANISHED!

JULIA came in from church and Bud returned from his visit to Gilroy but Jerry did not show up. They waited dinner until it was almost cold, then ate. Bud hurried out to assemble his patrols.

"Jerry went to look for Rastus," Bud told them. "He hasn't come back. We'd better all scatter and hunt for him."

As afternoon wore on three of the searchers foregathered, waiting for Tubby to come with his report; the trio had found no clue to the strange absence of Jerry.

"Mr. Gilroy thinks you fellows are a clever bunch," Bud informed Mark and Miguel as they waited in front of his house so as to be handy in case a 'phone call should come for Bud. "One of these days when he isn't too busy I'm to bring you in to meet him."

Bud told them of his visit to Gilroy, and then regaled them with his own deductions concerning the hold-ups.

"As I told Mr. Gilroy this morning, we practically cleared the avenue fellows almost at the start, though it looked bad for some for a while. But I knew Rastus Dorkum must have something to do with the thing and after our talk that day when you 'rung in' Jerry as a suspect, I began to think harder than ever, and to weigh every clue.

"I reasoned it out that the 'somebody else' must be from another section of the city.

"Rastus showed me who they were without meaning to, when he sent me to the shack. There they were, loafing till night. So they must be from another district, or they would be home. It sort of threw me off the track, at the party, when one of them pretended that he had put 'J. B.' in the compact for James Bailey instead of it being my mark in Julie's property. But I think they fixed up that story to throw me off the track.

"I know who the men are—that is, what they look like—and to-morrow Mr. Gilroy is going to have me go to the Rogues' Gallery and see if I can identify them."

"I bet you'll see them there," said Mark.

"Then we can nail them!" cried Miguel eagerly.

They paused to watch Tubby come puffing and hastening down the street. "Listen!" he called. "I just saw Jerry ——!"

"Where?" exclaimed three voices in unison.

"He got on a trolley car going outbound. I was—in the bakery—and I ran out. But I was too late—to call—or to catch the car."

"Did you get the number on the trolley?" Bud demanded.

"No ——" admitted Tubby, sheepishly. "I was too busy thinking about trying to get Jerry to hear me."

"Well," hazarded Bud, "probably he got track of where Rat was and went to hunt him up."

But Jerry did not come back to the house and when evening came and still no Jerry, the four companions sitting in Bud's living-room turned worried faces toward each other.

Then the telephone rang. Bud almost jumped across the room in his eagerness. He held a conversation that began eagerly, ran the range from surprise to dismay and then horrified negation, protest and a final dubious "I'll try—good-bye."

The others, even Julia and Mrs. Bright, sat almost holding their breath, so intense was their suspense.

Bud turned from the instrument to face them, a very sober, a mighty worried young man.

"Mother—Julie—fellows," he began to explain, "this is terrible! Jerry's father called. He says when they got home they found the place absolutely torn to pieces ——"

"The party ——" said Julie. "We ought to have gone over this afternoon and straightened up."

"Oh—but wait! He asked if I knew where Jerry was. I said 'no.' He said that neighbors had told him about the wild time last night and about the injury to Hastings and the way Jerry was arrested.

"I told him I knew, and you heard me say Jerry had stayed here all night and was not in jail at all. He answered that it might be true but that he was afraid his son couldn't—'was too big a coward' is the way he said it—'too big a coward' to face his father."

"He was going to face him," said Mrs. Bright.

"Well, I hope we can find Jerry before he gets home," Bud said. "Every bit of silverware, some other small stuff, and two rings—all gone! ——"

They all exclaimed in dismay and surprise.

"He didn't ——" began Julia hotly.

"No! But somebody did. Maybe he was there this afternoon—Jerry I mean—and saw the place. Maybe he went to find Rat and get track of those fellows—you know who I mean—and make them give back the stuff. His father is sure Jerry took it and ran away."

"No!" declared Julia.

"He's not that sort," Mark agreed.

"Well," said Bud earnestly, "we've got to find Jerry and prove to his father that he is innocent."

"How'll we find him?" demanded Tubby.

"I don't know ——" morosely, unhappily.

Nor did any of the others.

CHAPTER XIX

THE HIDEOUT

"Is Rastus Dorkum here?" inquired Jerry, standing at the closed gate of iron grill-work which prevented him from passing over the small outer space under the high stoop and in through the door held open to let a calculating, appraising eye caress him speculatively.

"Who're you?"

"I'm Jerry Hartley."

"It's O. K.," came the hoarse call from further within the hall: the inquiring one came out and opened the grilled gate. Jerry went past it, gave but a glance to the thin, weasel-eyed man who had so hesitantly stepped back to let him pass, and in the dull gloom of a bleak lower hall confronted Rastus.

"Hello!" greeted the latter. "How's tricks?"

"Rat," said Jerry hotly, "our apartment was entered after that party ——"

"You don't say!"

"I do say! I want to get the things back.

This has gone too far. After I entertained that Bailey fellow ——"

"Here, cut that out," said Rat shortly. "What makes you say him?"

"You know, well enough."

The wizened chap with weasel eyes stood listening interestedly, a queer grin on his almost skeleton-like features.

"I want to see Bailey. He's here, isn't he?" went on Jerry.

"Yep!" said Rastus curtly. "Come on."

He led the way up the creaky, old stairs, uncarpeted and almost ready to give way under any heavy weight, to the upper hall which was carpeted, past the shuttered parlor with its shades drawn tightly: up another flight he went with Jerry close at his heels, threw open a door and motioned toward the room. Jerry stepped through the door.

Rat followed and closed the portal. Beside a table sat a tall, rangy fellow, the companion of Ferret-face whom Bud had seen in the shack the previous evening.

He looked up and motioned to Jerry to sit down; the bed being indicated, Jerry sat on its edge.

"This the fellow your uncle 'phoned about?"

asked the man. Rat nodded and perched beside Jerry.

"Your pal, here, done you a good turn when he told his uncle to give you this address," said the man to Jerry. "You're lucky you got such a good friend."

Jerry said nothing to this. A feeling was coming over him that he was, in some way, trapped; the anger which had burst forth when he first confronted Rastus had fled, to be replaced by a feeling almost akin to that of the police station.

"Want to know just how lucky you are?" the man asked, leaning forward as Jerry looked speechlessly at him; marking off each word with the punch of a long finger onto his palm, he said slowly:

"The—man—who—got—hit—is—dead!"

Jerry caught his breath while Rat, beside him, and the man watched him steadily.

"The bulls will be combing the city for you," went on the man, "but you needn't to worry. You'll be safe here and you can live like a king. If The Top takes a liking to you and the way you do things——"

"The Top?" said Jerry, numb and chill from the news just given him, and feeling an icy

finger touch his heart at the way the name was spoken.

"That's the big boss here," he was told. "I'm one of his lieutenants. I think you're O. K. and I can do a heap to help you around here. All you want to do is to play along with us and learn all you can."

"But I didn't come here to stay," said Jerry, desperately. "I came to tell Rastus some things. I don't intend to stay here."

"You want to go out and be walked into jail?"

"No. I didn't throw anything—Bailey did that! I don't think they'd send me to jail."

"Oh, you'd just say Bailey did it, hey?"

Jerry rose and drew himself up. "Well," he declared, "I didn't say I would. You don't want me to stand the blame for what he did, though, do you?"

"No, not a bit. You won't stand the blame for anything. Just sit tight with us for a while till it blows over. In the meantime you'll have it easy here, and there's a lot of nice fellows you'll like to meet."

"Look here, mister," said Jerry. "You wouldn't want to keep me here against my will, would you?"

He was dismayed; never anything like this had

come into his life and he had no experience with such people as these to dictate a more careful, a more clever course. He simply blurted out his question as if he were dealing with any decent type of human associate.

The man looked at him very hard. "You trying to kid us?" he asked. Jerry shook his head.

"No, I guess not," said the rangy person. "You just don't have much sense. But your friends will do the thinking for you; so don't worry a bit. We can't let you go out to get yanked in by the bulls; and even if they only asked you questions, your pop would kill you if you went home."

Jerry could not say anything to that. It was an exaggerated way of putting the facts, but it was a bald estimate of his father's method of retribution.

"You've got no place to go. Better just stick here and take it easy. Nobody is going to hurt you any," said the man with a gruff appearance of good will that made little impression on Jerry.

However, he was not fool enough to believe he could get out of the situation by any bluster, threat or effort at escape. Better to sit tight for a while and allay any suspicion or watchfulness

on the part of this hive of evil people; then some means of freedom might show up.

Rat ushered Jerry from the room at the other's sign and led the dejected young man to the next room, with a window which looked out over the back yard; the window was barred.

"Now, just make yourself to home," said Rat. "After a while somebody may want to talk to you. It's my advice, kid, to talk and talk right out. I'm stickin' by you, but you got to be nice."

"What will they expect me to do—I am not fool enough to think when that fellow said I'd live like a king, he meant without doing something to pay for it."

"Don't let that bother you, buddy," answered Rastus. "The Top gives the orders. None of the rest of us does nothin' except take 'em."

"If you were a real buddy, Rastus, you wouldn't want to see me compelled"—Jerry's voice choked a little at the thought of the dire future his imagination was picturing, "—compelled to do things that might be against the law——"

"What do you think?" said Rat, crossly. "Think I'm goin' to help you walk out an' have us all pulled in?"

"I'd do all I could to help you get off without

any trouble," said Jerry, craftily. "As far as I know, there's nothing against you except that matter of Bud's bonds—and that was settled."

"The Top would get me same as he'd get you. Anyhow, I'm only just a little bit of nothin' in this organ'zation ——"

"All the more reason to get out and start straight like I want to."

Rat laughed coarsely. "Gee, buddy!" he chuckled, "you sure got a fine idea of this racket. *Once* you're in, you're *in!*" He lit a cigarette and sat down, tilting his chair back against the wall. "Listen, kid—they won't never let you go straight."

"How can they stop you—if you don't want them to?"

Rastus blew a series of smoke rings then inhaled soulfully.

"This racket is just like I tell you—it reminds me of a bed of roses, it's so diff'rent. You start out thinkin' like I did, well, it's just havin' fun. Then somethin' happens—like your party—an' first thing you know—you're in bad with the bulls.

"Once you're in dutch with the cops an' dicks it's good-night! They ride you. Even if you do go straight they frame you for any old thing they

can't find no other goat to hang it on to. An' if they do let you alone the gang won't. You're in it an' you stay in it!"

"They hold things over you, you mean," said Jerry.

Rastus nodded. "I'm sort of sorry for you, kid," he said. "I took a shine to you right at the start an' I hate to see you goin' into this against your will—but it won't be long before you'll get used to it ——"

"Not me!" cried Jerry. "Never!"

Rat favored him with a straight look.

"You'd better," he said slowly. "It'll be easier for you if you do."

CHAPTER XX

CONTACT!

MR. GILROY'S office, late Monday afternoon, was taxed to capacity. Besides the sleuth, leaning back at his desk, it held Bud, flanked by Mark, Miguel and Tubby; also, Jerry's father was there as was City Detective Burkey and Gilroy's own chief operative.

"We all know why we are here," said Gilroy in the clipped, incisive tones that marked his voice when a case was under way, "so we can get down to brass tacks. With city officers, private and amateur detectives working, harmony is better than duplicated effort or independent activity. Mr. Burkey, I take it you will specialize on the hold-up end of this?"

"Yes," agreed the man addressed. "Bud pointed out the two men he saw in the shack, this afternoon in the Rogues' Gallery. One is a Chicago importation with a string of aliases like a kite tail; the younger fellow has a couple of apartment jobs against him."

"Shall we leave them entirely to you?"

"If you land on them first, scoop them in. But I am going to sweat a couple of lads I have in mind and I think I'll have mine all tucked away by to-morrow."

"Good. On our part—Jerry. You may pick him up when you get your men. We may beat you, at that," he added with a quizzical smile as he thus put the city man on his mettle, for nothing could spur a public official to greater effort than the hint that outside agencies might get there first. Burkey grinned back.

"Maybe," he said as though doubting it, "we've already given you some help, you know. Hospitals, and so on—all covered. If he had run into an accident and never got to his destination we would know it, so that saves you considerable work."

"You don't want him, do you?" asked Gilroy.

"Oh, no. I figure he's O. K."

"You've rejected the runaway theory and the possibility that he is involved in the apartment job."

"Yes, I think we all agree on Jerry."

"I'm glad to hear you say that," said Mr. Hartley. "At first, I thought ——" he showed a softened face as he went on. "I have been pretty severe, too severe, perhaps. But, like his

mother, I feel that if we could just get our son back ——"

"You will," stated Gilroy decisively. "And Jerry will be a credit to you yet."

"I know he will!" said Bud eagerly.

"Now we will just sketch our plan. I know you are fidgeting to get going, Mr. Burkey ——"

The city detective nodded and Gilroy rapidly outlined his scheme for coördinating their various activities. At the end, Burkey left, and Hartley accompanied him to reassure the mother who was sitting with wide, stunned eyes, yearning to give her son the welcome and love so often denied him in the past.

"Jones," said Gilroy to his chief of staff as soon as the others were gone, "I want you to cover every district which Jerry could possibly have been bound for. Use every man. Check every spot that we know from past experience as suspicious. Bud has given you snapshots. You know what to do with them. Report the very first trace you get of our missing friend."

The chief operative nodded and went out. Mr. Gilroy turned to the four young men eagerly waiting for their turn to be assigned a part in this affair.

"I have some details of the case just finished

to go over with my principals to-night," stated Gilroy. "I will give you each a schedule of my movements and telephone numbers where I can be reached at any moment."

Rapidly he outlined to each the part he was to play. Miguel had gotten no trace of the missing Jerry at the car barns but he was instructed to go there to catch the men coming off duty during the evening. Tubby was assigned to keep close watch on the hat cleaner's little shop, with instructions to telephone to the chief at the least indication of suspicious movement from the man believed by all to be closely knit into the puzzling absence of Jerry.

"Bud," said the chief, "I want you to scour your neighborhood for every member of the avenue crowd you can locate. Tell them how serious we think the thing is for Jerry, get any trace you can of him, of Rastus. Put two-and-two together in your usual clever way ——" Bud reddened with pleasure at the compliment and assured his chief that he would work as he never had done before.

To Mark was given an assignment that filled him with elation. He felt that Bud had been highly successful so far, that Tubby had been given a share of the limelight as had Miguel of

the fire-escape while he, alone, had been undistinguished. Now he might get his chance.

"Mark," said Gilroy, "here is your part. I can't give it to Bud because I want him near the cleaner's shop in case his plump friend needs prompt assistance; Miguel will be well occupied at the car barns where we may get the first clue. I can depend on you, though, I know, so here is what you will do:

"Eliminating impossible suspects, I have fixed on a man who either knows something of this or can find out. Here is an address. I want you to go there. This man is a sort of Fagin—you all know the Dickens character who taught boys to steal ——" They all nodded.

"You will go in your oldest clothes. You will say no more than this, 'A guy ast me to get a answer.' Hand in the note I just gave you and wait outside. Do not under any circumstances go in. Either a reply will be handed you or someone will come to the door and question you. You don't know anything except that 'a guy ast me to get a answer.' There is absolutely no danger to you as long as you persist in staying outside the building; the only harm you could suffer inside would be that they might detain you to try to check up the sender of

this note which, of course, is 'faked.' But I am sure I can depend on you to be 'dumb' and carry out instructions. It may lead to our goal."

Mark, with envious eyes upon him, assured Gilroy that he could and would accomplish this thrilling task accurately, then departed with Miguel and Tubby. Bud remained only long enough to thank his chief for the help he was giving so gladly, then he hastened away to overtake his comrades.

"I wish I was in your shoes," Miguel was saying to Mark as they hurried toward the subway.

"You'd start a war, that's why you didn't get the assignment," declared Tubby. "I'd be too slow. Bud might be recognized. That's why Mark is starred."

"Picture it!" said Mark. "I walk up to the door. Ring the bell! 'Whadda you want?' 'A guy ast me to get a answer.' Nothing else. Out comes this terrible imitator of Dickens' man. Down on his knees! 'Mercy,' he begs. 'Tear up Jerry and I'll surrender the evidence!'"

But with all his effort to treat the thing lightly, Mark was at heart very serious and thoroughly

eager to comport himself creditably. The others, envying him, nevertheless were glad at his opportunity to play a star rôle.

They alighted from the car at the corner and while the three stood for a moment, Bud, seeing Bessie Gallagher beckon him from across the street, where her family lived in a flat above Gallagher, senior's, radio store, hurried over.

"I want you to know," she began, no longer haughty, but frankly penitent, "how sorry I am about the way I treated you."

"Oh," said Bud quickly. "Let's not think about it any more. You had good enough reason ——"

"But I am sorry, just the same. And I want to thank you for what you did for my brother." Bud modestly sought to disclaim any great credit and hurried into questions about any possible knowledge of Jerry or Rastus.

"I don't know anything. Billy and all the other fellows are out hunting the neighborhood," she said. "They have waked up, Bud—er—Mr. ——"

"Bud sounds fine," said he and after agreeing to call some night he shook hands and turned to rejoin his companions just as a big, blue sedan swung around the corner. Bessie it was who

caught his arm and prevented him from being struck.

He tarried to thank her while the big sedan swung in at the curb just down the street.

Suddenly, from the jewelry store in front of which it stood there came shouts, a loud cry, several shots! Three men, one bearing a satchel, streaked across the sidewalk and into the car while passers-by dashed into doors and hallways. As the sedan door slammed it was in gear, engine roaring, oil smoke pouring from its exhaust.

It made a wide swing around in the street, for police were down at the lower corner.

"Run, Bud!" cried Bessie. "It's a hold-up—they may shoot!" and she raced into the adjacent building. Up the street the car roared and was swinging the corner past Bud. Another car, backing around in the cross street into which it was swinging made it slow up for a brief instant.

In that instant Bud acted. His hands gripping the rear tire rack, feet on the bumper, he became a member of the party, unseen because of the thick smoke as its engine roared on the pickup.

Contact! thought Bud exultantly. He had

stuck to the curb to see the license plates but the front ones had been bedaubed so the number was unreadable. But through the windshield he had caught the merest glimpse, but a positive identification—of Rat!

CHAPTER XXI

NO ANSWER

It was to Mark an unfamiliar neighborhood in which he found himself at the culmination of his mission.

Old, dilapidated brownstone houses rubbed elbows with dingy stores in narrow streets. He turned from the grilled gate as it closed behind him and hurried a few steps, then caught himself quickly in hand: it was his part to slouch. Had he acted suspiciously? Was anyone watching to see if he did so? Perhaps he had done the one thing to spoil the plan of Mr. Gilroy: and yet that plan was already spoiled and what did it really matter?

Seeking a booth in the drug store he had previously "spotted" Mark made certain that the door closed tightly, pulled it to after him and dropping his coin in the slot, gave the number at which Gilroy could be found at the time.

"Hello," he identified himself. "They told me 'no answer.'"

"Let's have the story."

"I went there to the basement door—it's a gate—and rang. A short fellow with slitty eyes opened the door but not the gate. I offered the note. 'A guy ast me to get a answer,'" he quoted. "The other fellow looked me over and then went in."

"Yes," came the voice in acknowledgment that he had heard.

"I waited a little while and then somebody else came to the door and it was a tall, thin fellow this time. He sized me up and then he said 'No answer' and slammed the door. I forgot myself for a second and started to hurry off but I slowed quick. I hope I haven't made them suspicious or anything."

"Good work," commended the voice of Gilroy. "No, don't worry. I didn't want you to know it before, because it would have influenced your actions if you had known—but I have one of my men watching that address. The note was supposed to come from one of their own men, for I know some of that gang. It simply told them to let him know if they had a fellow named Jerry. The fellow supposed to have written the note would know if Jerry was there: so the minute they got the note they would guess it was from the police or some other investigators."

"I see," said Mark, and waited.

"My real purpose is to locate, definitely, the head of their band," explained Gilroy's voice. "If he is at the address you just came from my man will see no one come out. But if he is somewhere else they will send a messenger to tell him of the note so as to enable him to formulate his plans in the light of this development."

"Golly!" exclaimed Mark. "I see that too."

"So 'No answer' was the answer I expected but my men could not have gotten it; they might have been spotted. So I sent you and you have done well. I want to talk to that man if he's there, or to get to where he is, later to-night when I am finished here. Now you go and help Bud and your stout friend. And thanks! It was a real help."

Mark heard the click of the receiver and left the booth. He had half a mind to hang around the neighborhood for a while but his fear of upsetting in any way the work of the other watcher counseled him to do as Gilroy had suggested, and locate Bud.

The operative, reporting later, told Gilroy that he had seen a man come out, had trailed and finally located him in another building where, as he disgustedly stated, it turned out that the man

he had trailed had simply gone to join a friend in a game of pinochle.

So Gilroy knew no more for his ruse than he had known before, the luck of the game.

But the criminals were not to get all the breaks.

CHAPTER XXII

WHERE NEXT?

AROUND the corner, with Bud clinging to its tire rack, the blue sedan swerved, and raced up the cross street to whirl on two wheels into another avenue for a block, then again around a corner and up a side street like a comet.

With a sudden application of brakes that almost knocked the breath out of Bud as momentum flung him against the tire, the big car came to a squealing, grinding stop by the curb.

Bud was in a quandary. He did not dare drop off and run, nor could he tell why the stop was made so sharply. But he clung close to the car as he heard its doors flung open. Men were leaping out but there was no word spoken. If they came to the back of the car ——

But they didn't; instead they hastened to the front and Bud could hear another engine purring as nervous feet struck its running boards and one equally agitated pressed down intermittently on the accelerator pedal, causing its motive power to roar and speed.

Bud drew his head cautiously up till his eyes

looked through the rear glass of the blue car. He saw, ahead of it, another limousine, long, racy and black. Its doors were slammed and it raced away while Bud left his concealment in his eagerness to catch and memorize the numbers and letters on its license plate. The black car slowed for an instant and Bud ducked back, but it went ahead again with increased speed and waiting only long enough to let it get far enough away so he would not be recognized, he hastened after it toward the next street on whose corner he knew there was a 'phone booth in a cigar store.

His connection made, Bud asked the voice at police headquarters to check up his identification with Burkey of his own precinct station, hurriedly told about the jewelry store hold-up and his subsequent ride on the sedan bumper, the change of vehicles by the criminals—of whom he described one, Rastus—then gave the license number of the escaping car, heard it repeated and hung up.

A man who had come in to buy cigarettes stepped aside as Bud left the cigar store: Bud, looking around, became intent as he saw, just a few feet up the street, the black car. A man was apparently about to work on a tire. Trouble? "That helps our side," thought Bud.

Before he realized what was happening or could make a move to protect himself, he felt a hand under his elbow and the man who had come out of the store behind him rushed him across the sidewalk. There was no tire trouble; the man outside the car was ready to help get Bud in and his brief struggle was ended, the men were in with him, the car was off before the amazed cigar clerk took in what was going on.

The car was driven swiftly back to the spot where the blue sedan stood; evidently Bud's 'phoning had been correctly interpreted; they would change back to the sedan. It took but a moment for there were plenty of hands to compel Bud to their will. In less time than it takes to record the situation the change had been made back to the blue sedan and off they tore.

"Now," said a gruff voice, "let 'em hunt for the license you gave. Think you're smart, don't you?" and the subdued, panting Bud was poked, as he lay prone on the car floor, by a none too gentle toe. "We don't care how smart you are, they ain't goin' to git nobody what The Top lays plans for."

Bud made no reply: to do so would be futile; besides, he wanted to listen to the low conversational grumble from Rat and the driver.

"He nearly busted our plan, though," Rat was saying. "He's the feller I was tellin' you about what come near gettin' the goods on Bailey an' his pal."

"Yeah? Quick, ain't he?"

"Even named him Bright!" guffawed Rastus.

"Good thing you seen him out the back winder."

"Sure was. You can count on little Rat."

"Sure your uncle got the satchel?"

"Yeah! Seen him grab it when it was throwed as we swung."

Bud surmised from this that the satchel taken from the jewelry store had been thrown into the probably open door of the hat cleaner's emporium as they swung, which solved the point he had wondered at—why they had turned around and taken that chance of other cars coming along and blocking them. Now he guessed. They had used a noticeably colored car so that even though the license was smudged the color would be noted; then transferred to the black car, and having already gotten rid of their loot they could pass anywhere. But he had disrupted that plan—if only Rastus had not seen him! He had, however, and now the car was rolling him—where?

And while he wondered at this and at their return to the blue car instead of scattering and leaving the sedan and the limousine both abandoned, Bud's friends were in the jewelry store and feeling pretty proud that Burkey had recognized them and alone of the vast mob had let them within the police lines.

They heard the story of the jeweler who had been on the point of closing up when the three masked men had entered and with quick and apparently informed expertness had located his valuable trays and emptied them into their satchel.

The blue car was described by quick-eyed Miguel, and its description 'phoned to headquarters, whereafter Burkey turned with an exclamation.

"That Bud!—he's on the job all right! Headquarters says he just telephoned from a cigar store that he'd got the number of a limousine the gang traded for their own sedan. Expect we'll see him come parading along pretty soon."

But they didn't.

"Well," said Tubby, as they emerged from the store after watching Burkey gather clues and take eye-witness testimony and the blurry, conflicting descriptions which excited and eagerly

voluntary witnesses invariably give, "we're not on *our* jobs and we'd better get going. Quick! too. Me for the bakery." Miguel nodded and hopped on a trolley to ride to the car barns.

Mark, of course, had not yet reported from his mission, the outcome of which is already known.

Had Mark obeyed his half-hunch and lingered in the neighborhood he had recently left, it is possible that he might have seen a blue sedan pull up at a certain house. But he hadn't stayed and he, as well as the police, were at sea as to why Bud had 'phoned the number of a car later found abandoned.

Bud felt the car roll to a gentle stop, and with a handkerchief knotted swiftly over his mouth he was hustled across a pavement and down some steps, through a gate that clanged shut, past a door also hastily closed, up a hollow sounding hall, and finally into the same room that had not so very many hours before been visited by Jerry.

CHAPTER XXIII

CLEAR THINKING

"WHERE have you been?" asked Jerry.

Rastus, pushing his hat back on his head, grinned. "Oh, just out," he parried. "How'd you know I wasn't here?"

"I asked for you. I wanted somebody to talk to. You see, Rat, the man you call The Top had me up in his room ——"

"Oh—yeah? Say anythin' to you?"

"No."

"He don't," Rastus nodded. "He jus' looks you over. You get your orders from him but somebody else tells you 'em. I never heard him open his face an' I been under him near a year now."

"How did you get into this sort of thing?" asked Jerry.

"Oh, jus' like a lot. I thought it would be easy pickin's an' some thrill."

"It didn't turn out to be, did it?"

"Naw!" disgustedly. "I do the work an' the big guy gits the easy money. But what am I

goin' to do about it? If I was to try to work alone, the dicks would soon get me in the cooler. I ain't got the brains."

"Would you get out if you could?"

"Yeah, I reckon maybe I would. It ain't no fun, this bein' holed up an' havin' to run every time a bull starts to round up the gang. Nobody never happy: everybody scared or thinkin' maybe they ought to be. If I knowed the dicks would lay off o' me an' was sure the head of the works wouldn't nail me the first thing I knew, I sometimes think I'd quit playin' lookout an' gettin' the lay of the land for these fellers an' try bein' straight—but hey!" he broke off. "Don't say I said nothin' like this, kid. I was sent here about somethin' else an' you got me off it. I say! D'you know, you want to look out who you try to preach that stuff to. Most of the guys here is pretty hard. They been in it too long. Jail an' out an' then in again! Got 'em so hard they tried to make ever'body else tough like they is. But listen—what I come here for was this.

"Your friend Bud is here."

Jerry leaped up, amazed, incredulous, hopeful, fearful. He saw what looked to be sincerity in Rat's narrow eyes.

"Where?" he cried. "Can I see him?"

Rat nodded.

"You will, after a while."

"What's he here for—how did he get here?"

"He come a-ridin'. With me."

Jerry exclaimed again.

"Now pay close 'tention to what I'm goin' to say," Rastus commanded, very seriously. "This is real important. The Top looked you over an' he thinks you're O. K. That's point the first.

"Your friend Bud hung onto the back of a car I was ridin' in an' so we stopped an' told him to come on in an' he did an' we brought him here."

"What for?"

"Well—there was a little job pulled—an' he found out more'n was good for him ——"

"What are you going to do with him—to him?"

"That's up to you!"

"Me?"

"Yep, you. Now this Bud has played in with Burkey, like I told you before when I tried to get you 'off' him so you wouldn't spill what you knowed; that's all past now, I just mention it. Well, this Bud follered us, hangin' onto our car."

"Were you—Rat!—were you ——?"

"In on the job? Sure. First one o' this kind

an' I wisht I had been able to get out of it. But that's got nothin' to do with it. The thing is, we don't want this Bud hangin' around, we got enough troubles without him. The Top thinks it would be easiest if you was to agree to—throw in, sort of—with us, an' in that case he would take this Bud off far enough to keep him from knowin' where this place is, an' put him out o' the car an' let him go on home. That is, as I say, The Top thinks that if you are willin'—otherwise ——" He left the sentence in the air—and a sinister atmosphere that air was.

"Here he is now," said Rat, as the door opened and Bud was shown standing between two sturdy captors.

Jerry started up but Rat laid a hand on his arm and before Bud could do more than take a quick look at his friend, the door was shoved shut and one of the men stayed inside.

"What does he say?" he asked Rat, with a side look toward Jerry.

Rastus himself looked inquiringly at Jerry. The latter fought his battle against repugnance and dread. After all, it was because of him and his waywardness that Bud was in this scrape. Otherwise Bud might never have gone so desperately into danger. For this friend he might

do one thing, even at cost of his own future self-respect and well-being.

"Can I trust you to keep your word?" he asked, desperately.

"We'll take you with us in the car."

Jerry said no more, merely inclining his head.

And so, not many minutes later, a tightly bound Bud was led to the car where Rat, Jerry and the other man waited, though Jerry was under strict orders not to talk to him. There was a wait, then they were off. Bud was blindfolded just before they went out and as he was told to "step up" his stumbling, unsure foot caught in a broken spot on the step. They gruffly pushed him on and into the car which waited only for its cargo before speeding away.

"Now," thought Bud rapidly as he lay on the floor where they had thrust him, "I've got to think and think clearly."

The car jolted over car tracks, went on and then bumped over another line.

"One block!" thought Bud, and from then on his mind was busy. Around corners and over long stretches the car moved, a patched tire making a slight clicking bump as it turned.

Eventually the car stopped.

"Now," said a man, removing the hand and

foot bindings from Bud's stiffened limbs, "you walk down this road a hundred steps, and if you turn around you get plugged, see! Then you can go to thunder, for all we care!"

He pushed Bud out of the car and watched as the young man walked slowly away.

When his silent count had reached a hundred, Bud turned, yanking loose the knots of his blindfold. The car was not in sight.

"Well," reflected Bud, "I'm glad I remembered what Mr. Gilroy once said about using my head in a tight place. Let's see ——" He sat down on a stone, drew out a stub of pencil and old envelope, and began busily marking down notes. "Figuring from first car track to second car track—sixty-five turns of that patched tire. That means sixty-five turns to the short block, if I judge it anywhere near right.

"A hundred and thirty revolutions—two blocks, straight, then we swerved around to the left—and sixty-five more turns, then right again ——" And so on, marking down his checkup of the wheel clicks and the turns of the car on its way to his present location.

"Now if I am anywhere near right in the way I kept track," he considered, "I can reverse these turns, left where we swung right, and by count-

ing close to sixty-five turns to the block, can about hit the neighborhood if not the street I started from. Let's try!"

Off he trudged, through the desolate road.

"Let's figure—the last two hundred and six turns would have been on this road. I'll guess the wheels at thirty inch—and see how close that checks." He made some calculations of wheel and tire dimensions, translated these into feet, and the feet again into revolutions of so many feet per revolution, then trudged away more hopefully as he saw that his first reversed count brought him to the end of a short, deserted street.

"Right, or it looks like it," he told himself. "Into this street, because we turned left before the last long count. Yes! It's beginning to check beautifully!"

And at the first opportunity he hailed a taxi whose driver thought of Bellevue Hospital and the "batty ward" as his fare instructed him to swing this way and that, every so many blocks.

But Bud, who was intent on his checking, gave his directions clearly and assuredly and finally, at a corner, ordered the car to be stopped, found a hidden bill, always kept inaccessible to the average searcher, since his experience of the turnstiles, paid off the chauffeur and walked away.

"There's the trolley track—and here's the one we hit first," he exulted. "Now, unless I missed out somewhere, I'm on the street that I started from, and down we go to examine the steps till we find one that would be broken so it would just fit the toe of my shoe."

CHAPTER XXIV

THE BARRED WINDOW

"WELL——" Bud rubbed his chin perplexedly. "That's queer. I *know* I checked up right. It meant so much. I counted sixty-fives with my fingers and I am certain I remembered the turns. I didn't get mixed up a bit coming back—nope! There's that very hole in the pavement where they nearly shook my teeth out when we started.

"This is certain-sure the street; and yet I've examined every area step this side, up and down and back again.

"What can be wrong? Let me see, now——" he stood on the sidewalk, facing toward the first trolley track.

"This is the way the car was going. Wait!" he almost spoke aloud as an excited thought expressed into his mind from his subjective memories of the ride. "If the car was facing this way, I would have to get into it—from its right-hand side.

"But I was pushed in from the left-hand side—the side the driver sits on!

"Now, how could that be! A car comes up to the curb with the driver on the street side. You get in from the right ——"

He stood staring ahead with unseeing eyes. His hand smote his knee.

"By gravy!" he communed with himself happily. "I know!" He gave a glance up and down.

"Yep! This is a one-way street! The car could come up to either curb. So, then, if I got in at the left side, it was because ——

"Because the car was on the other side—across the street from here."

He hurried over and began his search with renewed vigor. To his delight he found the step with the broken spot and his foot went into it just as it had a while before.

Bud hastened away from the vicinity of that fateful step as quickly as his feet would carry him. He did not wish to be seen.

Quick eyes took in the neighborhood and impressed the location of the house on his mind. He had a fresh purpose now. Before he called up Gilroy he must locate Jerry. Jerry, he knew, had been in a back room and it had shown barred windows during that brief moment when he had seen it through the open door.

Swift and sure was his progress now; he knew exactly what to do. Up an alleyway between an old house and an older store building he crept in the darkness, avoiding some barrels, boxes and other junk and conscious that at the same time he was watching for a way into the back yard of the house of mystery and crime.

To find it was not so hard as he had feared. An old fence showed him the way. Over it, across a yard, and another scaling gave him a position whence he could scan the back of the house he sought.

Lightly he dropped to the yard and took his bearings: Once a rooming house, this old building had been protected with a makeshift fire-escape. If he could get to that, he might, by stretching his lithe, athletic body, reach that barred window which showed a dull glow through dirty pane and worse soiled shade.

The clothes-line in the yard gave him an idea; he unhooked several lengths of it as it ran from corner post to fence and back, until he had a goodly portion of it free. His knife served him well, and after a hasty examination to assure himself there were no weak spots, he went close under the fire-escape and cautiously gauging the distance, flung a loop into the air. No hanging

steps helped him here as they had served Miguel at the apartment party; but after several trials Bud got a loop of rope over a corner of the escape railing, tested until sure it would not slip with his weight and then, sailor-fashion he scaled it, hand over hand, slipping a little once, and burning his palms, but clinging with hands and crossed legs till he got an arm over the railing just as the rope began to give. With all his agility he caught the rail with his other hand, pulled himself up till a foot hooked the rail.

It was no work at all then, except that he must be quiet as he slipped along the rusty iron to the end where he could hold with one foot braced against the side of the dwelling, a hand on the rail, and, leaning far over, see the barred shadow on the window he sought.

It was lighted, but even as he looked and listened, the light was put out and someone inside called out something that might have been good-night. Bud waited an interval, then judging it safe, he tapped on the window in a double-three signal that had been used by Jerry in identifying himself when he rapped at Bud's door, back home.

There was silence; he waited, then tapped again. The shade was run up and a moment

passed before the catch whined and snapped, the window was raised very cautiously a couple of inches.

"Bud!" he identified.

"Jerry! that you?" He was ready to pull back to the fire-escape and slide down the rope he had taken time to secure more safely.

"Yes—it's Jerry."

"I can't get any closer; can you hear me whisper?"

"Yes."

"You all right?"

"Yes—but, Bud—I want to get away ——"

"All right. I wanted to make sure. Now I'm going after Mr. Gilroy and we'll get you out quick!"

"You'll have to hurry. They're planning to leave here and go somewhere else."

"Where?"

"I don't know. Sh-h-h!"

The window was drawn down and Bud drew back, then felt for his rope and eased down it as quickly as he could. Someone must have come back into that room. He must get away unseen.

The window became a dull square of light as he raced for the fence, and he saw the peering face of Rastus Dorkum looking out uncertainly

into the gloom; then the light was shut out, as if at his order, and Bud, as he dropped from the fence into the other yard, hoped prayerfully that he had not been seen.

Then he hurried back along his way till he regained the street and with as little delay as his search made essential, located the drug store from which Mark had earlier called, and ran to it.

CHAPTER XXV

THE 'PHONE CALL

Bud turned in at the drug store, closed the booth door and gave the number which should catch Mr. Gilroy at his club.

After some delay due to the necessity for paging, during which Bud chafed and fidgeted, the voice of his chief answered. Bud began a hurried recital of his chase of the hold-up car and the result, then his blood almost froze in his veins as he saw, through the glass, the peering eyes of Rastus Dorkum at the window and then his entry into the drug store. Rat might open the booth, probably would.

"Ask me questions," hurriedly begged Bud on the wire.

Rastus came over and pulled the door open.

"Just a minute, Rat," said Bud, then turned to the 'phone. His superior was as quick as had been the young man talking. Also he caught what Bud had just said, intentionally close to the transmitter.

"Locate Jerry?" came over the wire.

"Yes," replied Bud.

"Talk to him?"

"Yes."

"Innocent?"

"Yes."

"Held prisoner?"

"I think so."

"Was it this address?" and Gilroy gave the same number he had furnished to Mark.

"Right."

"I'll be there. Wait to meet me at the corner——" he hesitated, then named a meeting point. "I'll have police with me, so keep shady and don't let anybody guess you are hanging around. Anything else?"

"No. Good-bye—Julie, I'll be home soon," said Bud, justifying the necessary falsification by the need to throw Rastus off the track.

"Hello," he said, affecting to greet Rat for the first time.

"Hello. What you doin' back?"

"Back?"

"Around here!"

"Oh," carelessly, "I don't know what you mean 'around here,' but I rode up on a trolley and decided to let folks know I was safe."

As he came out of the booth, Rastus favored him with a careful study.

"Where is 'around here,' Rastus? Am I near where you fellows had me in that car?"

"Beans!" snapped Rastus shortly, and turning, started out. Bud was half minded to go with him, to stick to him for a while, but he did not know if Rastus actually had followed with others or if he had come alone; there was no use to plunge into the hands of the gang.

So he said good-night, with a warning that if Rat didn't look out they would "nail" him, and then pretended to hurry away. He walked steadily on, conscious that Rastus was standing by the drug store with eyes glued on his back.

At a corner Bud swerved around to the cross street and then paused and tried to peer around without being seen. He spied Rastus still watching but after a moment the latter appeared to have given up his espionage for he swung back into the drug store. Bud hastened off down the street to his meeting place, totally unaware that one of the pals of Rastus had waited in the shadow across from the drug store and was even now making sure that Bud had stopped for good on the corner where, in a bootblack shop he decided to have his shoes shined while he passed some of the time till Gilroy should arrive.

The time was long, too. It had to be, for Gil-

roy must get from his club to a police station, and assemble some of the officers.

"I don't know if he was 'phonin' his folks or not," Rastus was telling The Top, sitting silent and aloof in his room. "He said 'yes' an' 'no' all the time." The Top nodded and waved a hand. Rat went out. Orders might come later.

There were preparations being made for departure in that hideout: it was getting too hot, decided The Top as he gave his orders to his lieutenants, the only ones to whom he ever spoke. He was a silent man who ruled with iron hand this clique of hold-up men, footpads and store robbers. But, as is always the case in the long run, his plans were not going well this night. One of his best cars had been abandoned because of Bud's quick wit; the blue sedan could be used but he must get another car to take away his crowd; also he had to get Dorkum, senior, down there with that satchel and there were delays against which he must be prepared.

But one thing he could do, and he started the work without delay.

As a result, Bud, waiting on his corner, eyes watchful as he kept screened as much as possible in a shadowy doorway, saw a man coming quickly down the street. Bud realized, as the other

peered from right to left, that he was searching—perhaps for the young man himself. This doorway was unsafe if it was not a friend who was coming: so Bud strolled off down the street.

The other overtook him and slowed.

"Waiting for Gilroy, aren't you?"

Bud, taken by surprise, started. (The Top was clever: he had judged the note and the 'phone call concerned the same person, checking this by a report from one of his men that a Gilroy operative had shadowed him to his pinochle rendezvous.)

"Well," began Bud non-committally, "who are you?"

"I was sent to watch that house. Just 'phoned. He can't meet you here. Come with me.

"I saw you taken away," he went on as he urged Bud down the street, pretending to glance sharply from one side to the other. "I 'phoned the chief and later saw you get back and locate the place. I didn't dare speak because they were watching from the front.

"Now—just down here, and soon we'll hear the chief taking command."

He turned into an alleyway, and as Bud hesitated, three burly forms surrounded him and

though he struggled he was no match for them. It was all over in a few seconds, and he was half led, half carried down the alleyway and through a building into a yard, then boosted with tied hands over a fence, allowed to drop and left in that half-dazed heap until his captors scaled the fence and picked him up.

Shortly he found himself in the ground floor dining-room of the house he had previously been led into and out from. This time he was so placed in a chair that his arms, behind him, were tied behind the chair back.

"Now the chief will take command," said the lure. "But not the one you thought, my gay young smarty!"

CHAPTER XXVI

A HOT TRAIL

"M-M-MF!" ejaculated Tubby. "I'm ashamed to look a cake in the icing." The son of the bakery proprietor laughed. He, as well as his father, liked the fat young man very well, and although little had been said about his continued presence at the lunch counter in their bakery, it was tacitly agreed that he was not unwelcome. They both knew why he was watching the shop across the street.

"Take the pay-checks for me a while," suggested the son. "I want to go upstairs and fix that new grid leak in my radio; I guess I can trust you with the cash register."

Tubby grinned and slid up on the stool behind the counter. "Keep your eye on him, Dad," counseled the son, starting out. The baker nodded and went on sifting sugar on a trayful of doughnuts.

"Golly!" said Tubby suddenly. "Look over there!" He nodded toward the dimly-lit shop over the way: Dorkum could be seen trotting to

and fro past the door of the rear room, carrying parcels as he went in one direction, empty handed on the return trip.

The baker came up beside Tubby and stood for a moment watching. "Busy, isn't he?" he commented. They kept an eye alert until the swarthy foreigner appeared in his front room laden with bundles.

"Now, what's he doing?" Tubby wondered. "Look—he's coming out. Arms full, too. Locking up! Say——!"

The hat cleaning shop was being locked, in very truth: and on top of that it was plain that its proprietor was taking his departure for he stood on the curb until a taxi hove in sight, hailed it and began putting his many bundles into its rear.

"I've got to trail him," said Tubby. "Isn't that your Ford out front?"

"Yes—do you want to——?"

"Would you help me?" eagerly. "It's important to know where he goes."

The baker agreed with a touch of the thrill of the chase livening his own blood. Tubby hastened to the sidewalk to keep the departing taxi in sight as the baker signaled for his son and gave him hurried instructions to close up the

store at the regular time if he had not then returned, hurried out to his car and as the engine began its pulsations, swung the machine around with Tubby eagerly explaining that the taxi was still on the avenue. Off they throbbed in pursuit; the avenue was equipped with traffic lights and at first the Ford nearly lost the trail as it was stopped by a red glow, then they gained a block as the taxi ran into the same delay.

The baker was as excited by the chase as was Tubby, straining his eyes to catch sight of the quarry when other cars would cut in between. So the race kept up all the way down the avenue until the taxi, about five blocks ahead, turned off; the pursuers were in luck, the green go-ahead held for them and they again located the taxi as they wheeled into the street it had taken.

Mark, who had rejoined Miguel at Bud's home when both had failed to find either Bud or Tubby, waited anxiously trying to reassure Mrs. Bright and Julia, both of whom were decidedly worried.

"Bud's all right," declared Mark. "I'll bet you will hear from him any minute. He has just trailed the criminal car, I believe, and as soon as he is sure where the men are holed up he will call you and make your minds easy."

Sure enough, the telephone did ring, and Mrs.

Bright's hand flew instinctively to her heart in dread; but it turned out to be Gilroy who had reached his appointed rendezvous to find Bud absent and was 'phoning to learn if Bud had gotten in touch with home. Mark asked him where he was, and then, hanging up, renewed his assurances of confidence in Bud's safety, then fired by Miguel's excitement he said, "I'll bet I know where Mr. Gilroy is going to raid; come on, we may be wanted for something." He and Miguel hastened out to hunt a taxi on the near-by stand and start their ride toward the spot where Mark had been before.

Mr. Gilroy, his own speed car filled with police officers, parked on a side street close to the appointed spot, was conferring with the officer in command: the latter wanted to surround the house they had under suspicion, but Gilroy hesitated, a little afraid that some new development might have taken Bud away for a time and that whatever had happened might necessitate a change in plan.

* * * * * * *

And Bud? He was working slowly, methodically with the bonds which held his hands behind his back, in that sombre dining-room where he

sat with his guard. Preparations for departure were being hastened, but nothing could be done until Dorkum should arrive with the valuable loot from the up-town store.

Bud's captor was changing his clothes hurriedly: the suit he had on had been badly torn during the scuffle with Bud in the alley. Rat ran in and out of the room, anxiously peering through the front window shade and listening for the sound of his uncle's arrival. The blue sedan stood ready and another car was with it. But until Dorkum should arrive The Top did not wish to move; he figured that the absence of Bud would hold Gilroy back a little, giving them time.

"Here he comes!" cried Rastus excitedly as a taxi churned up to the sidewalk and stopped. At that instant the other man in the room was in a state of very much dishabille, one leg of his trousers on its proper limb, the other foot in the air as he balanced and teetered to thrust the uplifted foot into the other trouser leg.

Bud acted: like a comet he plunged, chair and all, against the balancing figure. Over went the man, totally unable to catch himself, banging against Rastus who in turn was taken by surprise and flung against the wall. The overturning of

the chair finished the loosening of Bud's bonds and he was able to slip his arms over the chair back and then free his wrists.

As he was doing it his legs were taking him past the man in a heap on the floor. Rastus, recovering, made a grab for him, but Bud was an eel for squirming, with his liberty at stake: he escaped the clutching fingers.

Shouts and warnings were issuing from the irate men behind him, and it was going to be a race against the pursuing Rastus with the complication of a man on guard at the door which he had been unfastening for Dorkum.

The man at the door turned and Bud, head swiftly lowered, cannoned into him, butting his stomach so that the man gave a grunt and doubled up. But it delayed Bud just long enough to permit Rastus to get out into the hall and he had Bud by the coat. With the movement of a person whose muscles are under perfect control, Bud slipped out of his coat, only to be met at the gateway by the incoming uncle of Rat.

Bud's impetus was sufficient to scatter the bundles the latter was carrying but Dorkum got a good hold on Bud's arm. Nevertheless Bud squirmed and tugged and by the super-strength of his effort he drew Dorkum against the lower

step of the areaway so that the dark foreigner tripped and loosened his clutch.

Up onto the street flew Bud: he had just an instant of real freedom and in that flash of time his eyes took in the car quite a ways down the street, from which Tubby was just emerging.

"Tubby! Tubby!" he shouted. "Get Gilroy——" and as Rat's arms closed about him and Rat's leg encircled his limbs in an effort to trip him aud get a hand over his mouth, Bud shouted the place of rendezvous. Dorkum and the men from inside had him now and back he was dragged but exultant in the knowledge that Tubby must have heard.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE CHASE

"Mr. Gilroy!" hoarsely called Tubby even before the Ford came to a stop. The detective was racing toward it on the instant but Tubby waved him back and called out the information that would start the rescue of his chum.

Another car raced up, a taxi this time; from it leaped Miguel and Mark, the latter throwing his fare to the driver. As Gilroy jumped into his car full of officers, Mark and Miguel swarmed in with Tubby and the baker and off went the two cars.

When they turned into the culprits' street, Mark gave an elated shout, for the men in the distance were just piling into their cars. Gilroy pressed his foot down all the way on his accelerator and the Ford seemed to be standing still as the larger car leaped away from it.

Which car was Bud in? That was the puzzle for Gilroy and he wanted to get close enough to see; but the criminals were off! In a veil of smoke and with gears fairly tearing to pieces as

they were mercilessly thrust into mesh, the two cars sped away. At the first corner they separated, the blue sedan going to one side, the huge brown car switching off the other way.

"Follow the blue car!" shouted Miguel from the Ford; he had caught a glimpse of Bud, instantly dragged back and down to the floor of the sedan. Gilroy almost wrenched his steering wheel apart as his powerful arms tore at it. Around they spun, not stopping to measure distance for the turn, the front wheels bumping up onto the sidewalk and down again as they straightened out the car and the speed again increased.

At the busy cross avenue the blue car tore along, narrowly missing pedestrians and other cars whose brakes smoked as the drivers, with white faces, rose and fairly stood up on the pedals to avert terrible disaster. Criminals that they were, the occupants of the fleeing sedan held others' lives as nothing and yet their very souls quaked at the fate they might themselves have met. Fear rode with them—fear that they might not "get the breaks."

Had Gilroy been equally hardened the chase might have ended very shortly, but he felt the sense of his duty to the lives in his keeping as

well as those he menaced on sidewalk and in vehicles; his brakes were hot and he saw the other car steadily drawing away.

But on a straightaway run, down a long, clear avenue, after a pause only long enough to allow an officer to drop off to 'phone in the licenses of the two fleeing cars and have the net spread to stop them at any point of egress from the city, Gilroy gave his powerful engine its head and the space between pursuer and pursued narrowed rapidly.

The blue sedan, on two wheels, swung around into a triangular park, and by the time Gilroy could check and turn his car, the other was out of sight around a turn. But though there were three choices of way, any of which it might have gone, Gilroy's trained ear caught the roar of the other motor, guessed direction cleverly, and once more the blue sedan showed ahead, though much further off.

Out of the park, past an astonished traffic officer the fugitive raced, followed by Gilroy's car with its shouting host and then by the Ford, clinging doggedly to the rear light of its larger brother.

Seeing that the street was clear of people, the police opened fire and it looked as though a tire

had been hit for the blue sedan slowed, but it swung a corner three blocks away and by the time they closed up the distance the blue quarry was empty.

Bud was dragged out of the sedan as it jolted to a stop and hastily convoyed up an alley; Jerry had been sent off in the other car.

Through a door that seemed to open magically The Top, with the criminals and their captive, went into a speakeasy and past the exclaiming guests, out of a door, up stair after stair to the roof, over and down again.

The hallway into which they descended was on the street parallel with that on which they had abandoned the car; and Bud, hoping devoutly that the pursuit had been quick enough to catch their trail, saw Rat go cautiously to the sidewalk to scout for the party.

Gilroy's carful, augmented now by the arrival of the Ford, had a blank to their credit, for, even in the speakeasy which the badges opened to their stern commands, no one professed to have seen or heard any unusual disorder. There were no clues, no leads to suggest which way the party had escaped, for though Gilroy knew they had gone over the roofs, he had three streets to lose them on.

It was Miguel's quick eye which discovered Rastus as the latter smashed the glass of a parked sedan to open its door and permit the culprits, still dragging Bud, to dash across the sidewalk and into the car. Off they raced as the motor responded to the deft driving of the expert they had among them.

At the next corner there was a swift discussion and The Top, on the front seat, questioned, nodded. They were going to put Bud out of the car in the hope that they might escape while the pursuit halted for him.

But Bud suddenly fought to stay with them, to their dismay and surprise. Bud knew that once on the sidewalk he would be a delay to his friends, that Gilroy would hesitate long enough to lose the trail, for the intent of the escapers was to double around the block. So he clung to the robe rail tenaciously for that precious second which made it impossible to delay longer and off again went the flight.

"Oh, so you want to stick, hey?" growled Rastus. "Well, you will, now, a whole lot longer'n you expect."

At the curt sign of The Top, he was silent, and the car flew down the street, under every ounce of power, but just as Gilroy's car sighted

it around a turn, the siren of a fire engine screamed and to avoid the imminent crash Gilroy needs must stand on his brake pedal and swing his car off its course. The Ford, cleverly managed by the baker, avoided collision by a miracle, and during the resultant delay their quarry was lost to their sight.

Now once more the criminals changed their adopted car, leaving the sedan with its broken pane to be picked up later. Off they sped in the first handy parked car they could get into, this time having forced the lock so that no broken glass should reveal their presence. So it was that as Gilroy's car, hotly pursued by the Ford, neared and slowed at the abandoned sedan, a glossy limousine, having made a complete swing at the further corner, now came smoothly and at a moderate pace past them. Its interior seemed deserted save for the driver; all the others were crouched below the line of the glass.

And so the chase was lost to the law, for with no description there was no reason to stop a limousine showing only its driver, and the car rolled easily and peacefully away into the by-roads of Long Island.

"Now," said Gilroy, as the detective, the officers and the young members of Bud's band held

a hasty consultation, "we may be checked for the time, but I'll depend on Bud to get in touch with us before morning."

The young chums of the amateur begged so hard that Gilroy permitted them to go with him to headquarters where he enlisted an Island-wide coöperation in seeking Bud and Jerry. But Bud did not get in touch that night.

CHAPTER XXVIII

CAPTIVE

Bud, rolled as tightly as possible in the tattered old cotton blanket on the hard floor, shivered. The attic was cold with the damp cheerlessness of a room neither heated nor visited by any sun.

Bleak daylight came in from the small, round cut in the wall which had been placed there without glass for the purpose of freshening the air when the place was built; it also served to admit all of the bleak frostiness of a dull October morning.

Bud drew his limbs as tightly together as he could and strove to think what he could do to better his precarious position. After the eluding of Gilroy the night before his captors had swung wide on Long Island's south shore till they reached a desolate waterside point where they had left the commandeered car and walked him to a house a half mile away: there seemingly lived someone in their debt for the dweller in this aloof old house had furnished them with his own car and let them drive away. Across the island

to its ocean side had been the next leg of the flight and to an old roadhouse, by then dark and closed for the season.

It was in the attic of this old roadhouse that Bud had been thrust with a locked door between himself and the others below. He had slept little in the cold room; and now the chill of an empty stomach added its bit to his discomfort.

He rose as the key ground in the ancient lock; the door was pushed open and Bailey sidled in with a tin tray which he set on the floor with a curt statement " There's your eats " and locking the door again, left Bud to his already cold and very carelessly fried egg, his dry and butterless slices of bread and his lukewarm coffee. But to Bud the provender was welcome and he made the best of a bad meal.

After the poor feast he went to the round opening at the end of the attic and by climbing on a packing case was able to look out. Afar off the thin sun poked a beam through cold clouds to touch the heaving ocean with a pale golden finger; from the steel and concrete boardwalk along the sea rim to a point where the edge of the window cut off his view, he saw clustered oceanside hotels and pavilions, the pretentious residences occupying choice grounds and then,

closest at hand, the lesser and now tightly boarded bungalows.

"Old Beach, or I'm away off the track," mused Bud, trying to match recollection of various newspaper articles and pamphlets with the information conveyed by his eyes.

Not that the knowledge of his location did him any immediate good, for the day dragged interminably on, with no sounds coming up to him except the occasional dull thud of a shut door. For all he knew, he might be the only person in the house besides Bailey; for that matter, Bailey might be gone by now; in all likelihood the gang had simply spent the night there and by now would be in another and a safer spot.

Bud wondered what Gilroy and his comrades might be doing; using every effort to get track of him, probably. And such, in fact, was their activity: Gilroy sent his men over every possible trail but the reports 'phoned in to him at police headquarters where he stayed to be at hand for the first inkling of a clue, were reports of failure, dishearteningly stressing the seeming impotence of his position.

Dusk was rubbing out the identity of the few objects in the bleak attic before the rusty lock groaned again. Again Bailey sidled in with a

tray which he substituted for the one which had remained on the floor all day: this time Bud was regaled with another portion of uninviting coffee, and bread and spaghetti, the latter cold and glutinous, just as it had been poured from the can. But he ate it.

Dreary hours dragged slothful feet in silent procession across the black attic, and Bud was straightening out his blanket before he rolled into its unsympathetic folds, when there came a sound at the door which gave him pause.

A key rattled uncertainly, then was withdrawn; clearly someone was there who had no intimacy with the proper combination of key and lock. Bud waited tensely while several attempts failed, then heard the grate of successful effort.

The draft of moving air told Bud the door was open and careful slur of feet informed his attentive ears that the room was shared by another, invisible because of the absence of all light. Then a paper match rasped and burst into flame.

"Jerry ——!" whispered Bud.

"Bud!" came the answer and as the match dropped, two hands found each other in a convulsive, clinging grip.

"I saw them let you go," said Jerry wonderingly. "Did they get you again?"

Jerry felt a finger touch his lips in the dark and stood silent till Bud crept to the door, felt and found it, and gently pushed it shut before returning to locate his chum. He piloted Jerry to the old packing case on which they perched.

"Gee, it's cold up here," said Jerry under his breath after Bud had given him an account of his recapture. "And you've been freezing up here all night and all day."

"It has been cold," admitted Bud. "How did you find out I was here?"

"I saw Bailey with some dirty dishes on a tray and I figured there must be somebody in hiding or being kept prisoner. I couldn't think of anybody else than you, so I watched when they were all in bed but The Top and his main pals, then got the keys from Bailey's coat and here I am. And, Bud," he went on hurriedly, but softly, "I'm sick of all this business and we're going to get out."

"I knew you hadn't run away," said Bud.

"Run away? Is that what Dad thought? I suppose it is. He and Mother came home and saw the place, I suppose. Well, Bud, I can't blame them. You certainly were dead right about things."

"Maybe I was, Jerry. You were so close to

yourself you couldn't see how it looked to other people."

"I know it. Bud—if anybody ever as much as whispers 'innocent mischief' to me again—I'll feel like punching him. It's not the mischief that hurts so much, but it's what it brings you to."

"That's it," answered Bud. "I've proved Billy and his crowd are all good scouts: not a mean one in the bunch. I know you'll be glad to hear that I'm getting to like Billy."

"You bet I'm glad. But, Bud, I'm staying away from Billy and all his sort unless ——"

"Oh, they're cured, I think. You see, Jerry, they've found out what a bad name meant when there was some real trouble."

"And so have I, you can just tie to that! Bud, I never looked ahead, but since I've been with these people I've thought a heap. Do you know —they made *me* promise to join their schemes if they'd let you go?"

"Well, even if you thought you were compelled to say 'yes'—you won't have to once we get out."

"And that won't be long now. Bud—I sort of wish we could do something for Rastus." He explained what Rat had said about being inclined

to straighten up. "It's no sort of life to pick deliberately," Jerry went on. "Look at Rastus! He thought it would be easier than working and that there was a thrill in it. He admitted he was too dumb to handle himself alone; he's since said that most all of these fellows find out pretty quick that they aren't smart enough to keep out of jail. But, he says, there are men who are at the head of gangs and they recruit their followers from his type—dumbbells who can obey orders and don't think for themselves.

"Rat admits that as soon as they get under one of these leaders they are worse off in some ways than before, because they don't get the breaks at all: they work and the leaders get the 'big end' of every 'job.'"

"I wonder," mused Bud, "if we'd dare offer to take Rat with us?"

"He's too scared," whispered Jerry. "Afraid of the leader—The Top they call this one—afraid of the police hounding him. That's the way they all end up—scared of everybody, even themselves."

"And look at this crowd now!" Bud agreed. "Running away, and not safe even here. The law may take time but it gets them in the end. And they know it."

"You said it," Jerry conceded. "They're going to light out at daybreak for another place, and then they'll be routed out of that, or caught."

"This 'Top' must have planned too big or gotten careless."

"I have talked some with one of the younger fellows," Jerry said. "He admits that the big fellows, even, overplay their hands, or else some member of the band gets careless or does the wrong thing. Even The Top is afraid, scared of himself, not sure he can trust his men; he holds them only with fear."

"Some life!" said Bud.

"Not the one for little Jerry. Me for decent company, able to hold my head up, not ashamed and slinking and hiding and dodging. Even if Dad does whale me ——"

"He won't, I'm sure," Bud stated softly. "He will be glad to get you back. Now let's see about getting back!"

"But, Bud—the man who was killed ——"

"What man was killed?"

"At my party—these fellows told me ——"

"That shows what they are! He's all right—saw him on the street."

Jerry was intensely relieved and they wasted

no more time in talk except that Jerry gave his chum a quick sketch of the layout of the line they would take. He tiptoed away to make sure the coast was clear, returning to lead Bud down the old stairs.

In the lower hall they had to pass three closed bedrooms to get to a window at the end of the hall: once this was open they could drop onto the side porch roof and climb down the twine which in summer supported vines.

They negotiated the way to the window undisturbed; but the catch stuck and when that was managed the sash was tight. Bud had to give it a hard push and as it lifted there was a squeal and a rasp that brought the head of Bailey to his door.

With a shout he leaped toward the pair trying to get out: his hand on Bud's collar, the other holding Jerry by a leg, he delayed them until others dashed out and hauled them back.

Down to the room where The Top sat they were conveyed. Cold, hard, the gang leader looked them over and heard the charge against them. The only words Bud ever heard him speak were pronounced in sentence upon them.

"Rope 'em. Head to foot. Separate. Chuck 'em in th' attic. Board up th' door. We pull

out at daylight. Let 'em holler, nobody'll hear 'em."

Later the last taps of the hammer of doom smote on their ears as the board was put in place to seal up their tomb.

CHAPTER XXIX

BEFORE DAWN

"JERRY ——" whispered Bud after an interval.

"Yes, Bud ——"

"Can you roll yourself—quietly so they won't hear if anybody is under us—roll to the middle of the place?"

"I—yes, I think so."

"I'll roll to meet you. Careful. Don't make any more noise than you can help."

There was a silence, broken only by slow shifting of bodies and occasional grate of heel on a board as both captives strove in their lacings of rope. Finally by dint of whisperings they were able to locate one another and come to a place close to the center of the attic floor.

"Now, Jerry—can you move your hands?"

"I can wiggle my fingers."

"I can move my hands a little. Is your knife sharp, Jerry?"

"No—not very."

"Mine is. Do you suppose if I work around,

you can get your fingers in my right hand pants pocket and dig up my knife?"

Jerry was anxious to try and so they maneuvered again and after what seemed an age the knife was grasped and eventually drawn out of its resting place.

"Between us we can get it open," went on Bud with his directions as Jerry held the knife and his chum worked with stiff fingers until a sharp blade snapped open.

"Now, Jerry, saw my rope if you can. Be careful to cut it only on one strand if you possibly can. We are going to need this rope."

Jerry worked away obediently: it took a long time for he had very little play for his fingers and he was afraid of cutting Bud if the knife should slip; but in time the rope parted and bidding Jerry grip one loose end, Bud managed to roll himself part way out of the rope until he could get an arm free. From there on it was but short work to unwrap the rest of his body and as soon as this was done Jerry was given a prompt freedom.

They rubbed stiff limbs and worked muscles limber again. Then Bud took Jerry to the circular opening at the end of the attic.

"If I guess right, this rope will just about go

down," he said. "There won't be any to spare and I am afraid I'll have to use you as a counterbalance to keep the rope from running out: there's no place here to tie it and it won't carry to the beams."

Jerry was entirely willing to be the anchor.

"I'll go down and get help," assured Bud. "You won't be in any danger because I don't think they'll even bother to come up here. You pull up the rope and hide it and if anybody does come up, get back of the door and jump them and try for an out—but I guess I'll be back before then."

Wriggling and squirming, with the rope around his arm, Bud managed to get from the top of the packing case to the window opening and barely squeeze through it. Then, as Jerry braced the rope around his body, hands stiffly held against the side wall, Bud managed to climb, slip and slide down the rope. There was a drop, even at that, but not a long one nor did he believe that the thud of his feet on the grass told of his escape. Tugging twice, he released the rope and felt it slip back up the side of the roadhouse.

Then off sped Bud, only making sure of the location and environment of the building before

he hastened to hunt out the police station. It was near dawn before he met a milk wagon whose driver gave him the needed directions.

To the drowsy desk man Bud panted out enough of his story to get that dignitary to communicate with New York headquarters. They gave him identification for Bud and presently communicated with Gilroy, with the boys still close at hand, he having taken them home with him at their urgent requests. The private sleuth established Bud's prestige and urged the desk man to work with him in getting his men to the roadhouse so that the priceless satchel at least could be recovered.

It took some time to assemble the beach resort's police, for in October there are not many men in the station house. Finally a half dozen men were secured and with the car one had brought it took only a short run to bring Bud and his supporters to the street from whence they could surround the building.

Meanwhile Gilroy, with Tubby, Miguel and Mark excitedly counting the miles, was speeding in a police car past all traffic men and at a sixty-mile clip toward the center of activity.

CHAPTER XXX

DAYLIGHT

THE TOP was up early. He stood on the roadhouse porch, scanning the reddening east as his mind went over his plans. Was he safe, he wondered; had he made his preparations as carefully as usual? Or was this strange dread gnawing at his inner consciousness robbing him of his customary thoroughness?

A sound beat in on his attention: the steady, low drum of an idling automobile motor. Not a milk truck; too light and too rapid; not in a garage. He listened, growing cold, while beads of perspiration flocked out on his forehead. Up around the corner was where that sound came from! And then he caught sight of a form dodging behind the far shed on the roadhouse grounds.

Turning, he leaped into the house, shouting: and to his shout came echoes from outside and from within, the calls of command from the surrounding force, the cries of fear and uncertainty from his own satellites.

"We've got them!" called the officer commanding Bud's party. "Young man, keep back! Stay behind that garage!" Bud obeyed, though he longed to rush around to see if Jerry might be at his little window.

"Surrender or we'll come shooting!" called out the policeman. A chorus of cat-calls greeted him and a pane in a window tinkled to the paved walk as the first shot of the attackers sounded.

Dodging for every advantage as they advanced, the police cordon drew steadily closer while the besieged miscreants returned the fire intermittently, showing the folly of a rush until their ammunition, which could not be plentiful, was exhausted. This was the purpose of the police—to draw fire until it would be safe to make the dash that would end the mimic battle.

The back door of the roadhouse was flung suddenly open. "They're coming out!" cried an officer and the force began to converge on the rear of the place; as they did so, from down the street came the roar of an arriving car, the hiss and grind of its balked tires, and from it before it even stopped leaped Gilroy, Burkey, Mark, Miguel and Tubby, the latter doing more of a tumble than a leap.

Thus it chanced that while the raiding officers

were caught by the criminals' ruse, the arrival of Gilroy's car saved the situation, for these were right in front of the grounds and so took by surprise the men who were making their dash for freedom that way.

With two guns popping, Gilroy, flanked by Burkey, made the advance, stopping the first sortie. Mark, Miguel and Tubby, ordered to duck behind some covering, started to race back around the big house and at the same moment Rastus, and several others, coming from a side window, leaped out almost in their path.

Miguel made a flying tackle and got one; Mark grabbed the leg of a second and Tubby, in his excitement falling over his own feet, landed in a heap over which a third, Rastus, tripped and went down headlong.

Bud, hovering beside the garage, noticed that The Top had not yet made his exit. He was watching eagerly when suddenly he saw a tongue of flame lick up through the kitchen.

An oil stove, impressed into service, had been overturned in the excitement and, as Bud shouted, the flames were gripping at the old walls and roaring up through to the upper floor.

"Jerry! I must get Jerry!" shouted Bud across a space to Gilroy, and the latter shouted

some warning which Bud disregarded as he raced across the line of fire from police guns, unheeding.

Into the back door he hurried, past The Top and Bailey who stood concealed there. They made a clutch for him but the roar of the licking flames spurred his effort to dodge; he evaded their hands and raced for the stairs. But the fire, spread by the spilled oil, made the rear stairway inaccessible.

Bud knew there was no time to be lost: the old building would go like tinder; he had three flights of stairs to climb and a board to rip free before he could get to Jerry.

Up and up he fled, panting. Below he could hear the cries of men, the popping of police guns as the cordon drew closer. Above this came the crackle of rending wood, the smashing of hot glass, the hollow laughter of happy demons as they seared their way upward; but he moved as swiftly as they, and soon found himself outside the old door to the attic room. Smoke was beginning to seep up through the cracks as he caught hold of the board nailed across the door and tore at it with fear-strengthened fingers.

"Jerry!" he shouted as he worked. "Jerry—are you there!"

"Yes," came the muffled reply.

The smoke was growing thicker now, lying like a pall. The board began to give as the nails wrenched out a little. With a superhuman effort Bud tore off one end and began to rip and tug at the door.

"Jerry," he shouted, "ram the panels with something—quick!"

"All right!"

The young man inside caught his excitement and began to batter at the thin wooden panels with a board. Soon they splintered and then gave. Bud shouted the news of danger and tore at the sides of the openings until he had a space through which Jerry could crawl.

But as he came slowly out, Jerry suddenly stopped and his face blanched even as Bud whitened in nameless terror.

"My coat—it's caught on a splinter!" he gasped.

Bud tore and ripped at the door, but the stout wood between the panels would not give. Jerry could not go back. The smoke was so thick it made both cough. The floor felt hot to Bud's soles.

Rapidly Bud cast about for some implement. He saw an old board, and using it for a batter-

ing ram he sent it with all his strength against the old lock: it groaned and gave a sharp crack.

Again Bud plunged and this time the door gave way, but as it bent back the end of Bud's board slipped from his hand and struck down. Jerry, with a moan, grew limp.

Forcing door and inert body inward, Bud managed to get his lithe form into the attic. He tore away the coat and splinter which Jerry could not reach, dragged the still figure back into the room, bent over it an instant, then, as smoke belched up into the doorway he snapped a handkerchief around mouth and nose and with a tug and a heave lifted Jerry to his shoulder.

How Bud got down the stairs he could never tell. But he did, and then in the smoke-thick hall he almost gave up as two forms grappled and surged in his path, gasping and battling for a satchel.

"You would—you double-crossin'——" gasped The Top, seeking to wrest the satchel from Bailey. Then the fire leaped at them, Bud and his burden went in a heap across the satchel, and the hall was still save for the racing of two terrified pairs of criminals' feet and the cackling roar of cracking flames urging forward to reach the two victims prone across the satchel.

CHAPTER XXXI

AND THEN—

"M-MF!" said Tubby. "Mrs. Bright, these cookies are the best you ever made."

She would have offered him another, but Mark bowed over her hand, took the plate and set it on the table, out of reach of Tubby.

"Curb your sweet tooth," he commanded. "Save some for the invalid!"

"I am no invalid," contended Bud, from his place in the big chair. "Jerry and I swallowed some smoke, that was all."

"Cripes!" cried Miguel. "It was just like a book! I saw you run in. I was so busy trying to hold one fellow I couldn't go after you—and the fire was getting bigger."

"Here!" cried Mark. "You're stealing my stuff."

"You tell it, then," urged Miguel. "Go ahead—'Picture it ——!'"

But for once Mark was strangely silent.

"You don't want me to tell it, and you won't! You see," he turned to Mrs. Bright, "I was hold-

ing one fellow, Tubby had fallen over another one and was sitting on his captive's chest. Mark tripped his own man and stood up just as I saw Mr. Gilroy rush after Bud. But two men met Mr. Gilroy at the door, and he had his hands full before he could capture them with Mr. Burkey helping him.

"All this time I was getting worse worried about Bud. So was Mark, for he dashed off around to the other door, and went in. The next thing we knew, Mark was out again, yelling for help. He had found ——"

"That's all right. You can stop now," said Mark, modest and red.

"He had found Jerry and me, where we fell," Bud said. "But we were so tangled up and the smoke was so thick he couldn't do anything alone, so he got help—and then the firemen came and the fire was put out and the gang was put in jail and I was put to bed."

"And the satchel—don't forget the satchel," cried Mark. "Picture it! Into a burning building and down the stairs with a chum, and then fall all over the satchel with all the criminals' loot packed in it, and dragged into daylight with one hand clutched around it so tight they had to use a crowbar to pry it loose!"

"And Jerry is all straightened out with his mother and father," said Mrs. Bright.

"I'm glad!" said Bud's sister. "Bessie Gallagher called yesterday and gave me back your Christmas-gift compact, Bud."

"So, all is well," exclaimed Miguel.

"What about Rastus?" Mark wondered.

"Mr. Gilroy says he had a long talk with him. Rat wants to be honest if he gets a chance. Mr. Gilroy is going to give him that chance by sending him to work for a friend of his where Rat can climb the ladder if he has the stuff in him."

"And then—you get a reward from the jeweller, and maybe one from the furniture people, and that tie and shirt Mr. Brown sent."

"I can't share the shirt and tie," Bud laughed. "But the reward splits five ways."

"Oh, my—no!" expostulated Mark. "Bud ——"

"Five ways!" Bud said with finality.

Tubby was nibbling the stub of a pencil and then working out a sum in arithmetic.

"What are you figuring?" demanded Miguel.

"How many times ten cents—price of a cream puff!—will go into five hundred ——"

"All wrong!" cried Mark. "Figure how many cream puffs will go into Tubby."

"No," said Tubby, "I guess I will put it into my dad's fur business."

"And I'll take a course in story writing, unless Bud will let me be his assistant when he buys a half interest with Mr. Gilroy."

"A half interest? Why, he wouldn't want me—a clerk in his office—trying to buy a partnership!"

"He may, at that," said Miguel. "If you keep away from gunmen and the underworld and don't get mixed up with any more trouble."

Tubby voiced the general idea on that score.

"Ah!" said Tubby. "But will he?"

Further adventures of Bud Bright and his boy detectives will be found in "Bud Bright and the Bank Robbers" (in press).